

Tackling Epilepsy: an interdisciplinary approach

For the third consecutive year, representatives of the Caritas Malta Epilepsy Association (CMEA) have been taking part in an EU funded Socrates Grundtvig II program, together with colleagues from Germany and Hungary.

During this program the partners co-ordinated their efforts in order to formulate a “Curriculum regarding Epilepsy for Professionals Allied to Medicine (PAMS)”.

Epilepsy is the most common chronic neurological disorder. The condition encompasses a range of functional disorders of the brain, the common characteristic of which is a series of repetitive unprovoked seizures.

There are over 30 different types of seizures. Most epileptic seizures last somewhere between a few seconds and a few minutes. These may be single and isolated or may occur in a series of seizures, usually manifesting themselves as unusual bodily movements, effects on consciousness, and altered behaviour, depending on the part of the brain that is malfunctioning.

Very often the cause of the epilepsy is unknown, although some may begin to experience seizures following trauma such as a car accident, or tumors.

The World Health Organisation estimates there are 40 to 50 million people with epilepsy throughout the world. In Malta it is estimated that there are around 3,000 persons with epilepsy. Modern treatment with medical therapy can achieve full or partial control of seizures in about 85 percent of cases.

Yet social, educational and employment stigmas persist world-wide, even in Malta. In addition, there are a number of social, and economic factors which will influence the outcome of seizure control in persons with epilepsy and lack of data relating to the numbers of persons with this disability.

This hinders progress in allocating medical, support, educational and employment resources for persons with epilepsy and their carers. These issues must be tackled if these persons are to be socially included and lead more productive lives.

Professions allied to Medicine (PAMs) have an important role to play in addressing these issues and this is why such a curriculum was being devised.

Last month, Mr. Mario Dimech (President, CMEA), Ms. Victoria Dimech (Secretary, CMEA) Dr. Janet Mifsud (Department of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Malta; advisor, CMEA), were invited to The Bethel Epilepsy Centre in Bielefeld, Germany, one of the largest such centres in Europe, for the start of the third phase of the project.

This medical facility is unique in that a wide variety of multidisciplinary teams work together in order to achieve social inclusion for persons with epilepsy.

During the various sessions, the discussion focused on integrating and finalising the various areas that are to be included in the curriculum, novel ways in which to deliver the

pedagogical tools, ways in which this can be disseminated to the different professionals interested.

This learning should be accompanied and supervised by tutors on an e-learning platform using the facilities of this media for interaction.

During their stay in Bielefeld, the Maltese participants also visited two schools, the Mamre-Patmos-School and the Albatros-School for children and young people with learning difficulties.

These visits gave an insight of how the inclusion policy or lack thereof is working, how epilepsy is managed in these schools and how students are prepared for their transition from school to the work force.

The final Grundtvig 2 meeting will take place in Malta this month, when a pilot trainers' course, based on the curriculum developed, will be organised.



PARTICIPANTS in the EU-Funded Socrates Grundtvig II programme during the meeting in Bielefeld, Germany (back row, from left) Mario Dimech, Victoria Dimech, Petra Novotny (Germany) and Dr Janet Mifsud; and (front row, from left): Dr Csaba Borbély (Hungary), Dr Judit Bekes, (Hungary), Dr Margret Pfaefflin and Verena Hezser-von.Wehrs, (Germany)