

The second session included an interactive play and a panel round discussion. It depicted "Steve" going to several interviews during which he is at a loss as to whether or not he should divulge that he has epilepsy. He adopts both options and in both instances he is not sure whether he has taken the right decision or not. At the end of the play, he turns to the audience and panel to get their opinions and reactions to his dilemmas.

The Panel:

Mr. Joe Camilleri insisted that people with epilepsy (PWE) needed to be assertive and should fight to improve the status quo. There are mechanisms in place which could help them prove discrimination and they should know about them. They should also project themselves well and should not use 'suffer' but have epilepsy. They should never play the victim. On the other hand it is not obligatory to divulge you have the condition unless you would be working with certain machinery. Notwithstanding a person who divulges his condition has a better stance if and when a case of discrimination needs to be proven. To date two cases were settled favourably through dialogue and good will. It is important that people with disability and who have succeeded should share their experience so that their success can be replicated.

Ms Hanneke de Boer agreed with Mr Camilleri and said it is important to think about what one is about to say. The message to impart is very important. The truth always seems to be the best option. If there is a medical examiner, he can always speak to the neurologist to get a clearer picture. Lying to the employer will have a counter effect.

Ms Dorianne Pawney stated that ETC has a section through which pwe can be helped to find a job fit for their situation. This caused quite a discussion and it was made clear sometimes the services are not at par with what the service seeker needs. There needs to be more clarifications. She also stated that it is up to pwe whether to say that they have the condition but if they do they will be directed to different support services. Ms Lorna also from ETC support centre said that they consider qualifications and also note the duration a person has been registering for work. This got a reaction from Mr Manwel Camilleri who said he was never asked and never directed to any special sections for the past 15 years. On the other hand a doctor at a health centre said that it was irrelevant asking for a certificate from them instead of a family doctor since they rarely actually know the patients.

Mr. Joe Gerada from the Foundation for Human Resources Development said that the situation prevails where institutions show what they are providing but the people are saying that they are not effective enough. One needs to evaluate if results are not forthcoming. There needs to be guidance vis a vis the psychology of the employers and what needs to be done. Speaking of his own experience, coming from a social worker and management point of view and when being on interviewing boards, he sees that employers are ready to make adjustments. A 'good' employer does not mind taking risks and be innovative however he wants to be stable and needs to know what he is dealing with. Courses in HR wherein people are educated on the matter will be of immense help. There needs to be mediation, guidance and preparation before and after the interviews so that every one learns from the experience.

Mr. Joe Farrugia of the Malta Employers' Association said that he has not encountered cases involving pwe. He reiterated that you have a right not to divulge having the condition unless required especially where liability issues may arise. He said stigma increased as a result of ignorance and lack of information. He recommended HR managers to be made aware of what epilepsy is and what the implications are in individual cases. He also said that there are schemes which could be used and these could go a long way to make things better for people in difficulty.

Dr. Roselyn Borg (a lawyer) said that in her experience, employers are not against carrying out reasonable adjustments. It was important that employers are informed so as to be able to cater for the needs of the individual and be equipped to deal with situations that might arise. She felt that there was more awareness in the UK whereas in Malta people are still relatively scared. If an employer is found to have discriminated against someone he can be taken to court. She insisted that the relationship between those providing services and those who need them need to be made more clear.

Dr. Josanne Aquilina said that even though doctors dealt mainly with the medical side, they also give guidelines as to the type of work/career one should pursue. She said that their main objective was to control the fits as much as possible but in the meantime people have to get on with their life. She has encountered people who have expressed difficulty in finding jobs and said that discrimination can happen at any stage from when the advert is issued, during interviews and also in employment.

A person from the audience recounted how her brother was not accepted for work here in Malta and after emigrating, he has a managerial post and is very well established. He was accepted for his abilities and not for being 'a perfect human being'.

Another person said that she cannot see why if pwe show that they are capable of doing the work they are seen in a different light. She insisted that even when she was sick she was afraid of availing herself of sick leave for fear of being fired because they would have thought that she took sick leave because of seizures. The fear of being fired was constant.

Manuel Camilleri insisted that the Maltese term 'tal-qamar' was very degrading and should not be used at all.

Victoria Dimech said that what the panel was saying was 'the ideal' however in the real world, the fear of being discriminated against still prevails. She said that you have to be responsible in work choices, know what you are capable of in applying for. There are 40 types of epilepsy, so you cannot just state that you have epilepsy, but you should give a slight overview of what kind of epilepsy you have. People are scared because they do not have enough information or even worse they have wrong information. She said that she wishes that a day would come when people do not need to be scared anymore of saying they have epilepsy because they would be accepted like anybody else having other conditions such as diabetes.

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