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Abbreviations

AEDs – Antiepileptic drugs

IBE – International Bureau for Epilepsy

ILAE – International League Against Epilepsy

LAMICs – Low- and middle-income countries

mhGAP – Mental Health Gap Action Programme

mhGAP-IG – Mental Health Gap Action Programme Intervention Guide

NGOs – Nongovernmental organizations

WHA – World Health Assembly

WHO – World Health Organization

Introduction

The treatment of epilepsy has long been neglected in public health programmes despite its high disease burden, the major impact on the people it affects, and the existence of inexpensive and cost-effective treatment. Access to treatment for those in need is crucial: up to 70% of people with epilepsy could be seizure free if they received treatment with oral antiepileptic medicines.

Not only is it essential to ensure that those in need be able to access this treatment, access to information about epilepsy is equally important. People with epilepsy and their families often suffer from stigma and discrimination because of the lack of knowledge and understanding about the condition.

In 2015, the World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted a resolution on epilepsy, WHA68.20, which urges coordination action at the country level to address its health, social and public knowledge implications. The resolution highlights the need for the WHO to help strengthen countries' capacities to address epilepsy and facilitate resource mobilization. This resolution is a powerful tool to assist countries implement effective actions to improve medical and social services for people living with epilepsy, promote public awareness about epilepsy and allocate resources towards epilepsy research.

The Global Information Kit on Epilepsy has been developed as part of the WHO Programme on Reducing the Epilepsy Treatment Gap to support implementation of WHA68.20 recommendations. It provides general information about epilepsy, an overview of current pilot projects as examples of what can be achieved, and actions that can be taken by specific stakeholder groups with reference to WHA68.20. The intended audiences for the Global Information Kit on Epilepsy are policymakers, specialist and non-specialist health care providers, people living with epilepsy and their families, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the general public.

The epilepsy "treatment gap" is the percentage of people with epilepsy whose seizures are not being appropriately treated at a given point in time.

Epilepsy. Treat it. Defeat it.

Epilepsy is a chronic disorder of the brain characterized by recurrent seizures. It affects people of all ages and often has no identifiable cause. More than 50 million people worldwide have epilepsy, and nearly 80% live in low- and middle-income countries (LAMICs). Every year, an estimated 2.4 million people are newly diagnosed with epilepsy.

Epilepsy can be treated

Epilepsy treatment is inexpensive and is effective for controlling seizures in 70% of all cases. Despite this, about three fourths of people living with epilepsy in LAMICs do not receive the treatment they need.

Why is this the case? In most LAMICs, antiepileptic medicines are frequently unavailable. In these countries, there are also very few health care providers who have the appropriate training to recognize, diagnose and treat epilepsy. Furthermore, lack of knowledge or misperceptions about epilepsy may affect health-seeking behaviour. People with epilepsy may not access treatment from health care facilities and instead might seek help from other sources that may be ineffective. They also may not seek regular follow-up care or adhere to medications as prescribed.

Epilepsy can be defeated

To support countries to defeat epilepsy, the WHO Programme on Reducing the Epilepsy Treatment Gan focuses on expanding the skills of non-specialist health care providers to diagnose, treat and

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