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New survey reveals devastating impact of some epilepsy drugs on normal brain function

Paris, 5 September 2004: Nearly half of people with epilepsy have problems learning something new and feel they can't think quickly enough, with even more reporting that they regularly feel sleepy, tired and lethargic.¹ Results of a major new European survey show that patients often blame their difficulties on the drugs they take to control their epilepsy – the very drugs that should be helping to control the symptoms of their condition.

These results confirm what many epilepsy specialists have long suspected: some treatments can have a major impact on the everyday lives of people with epilepsy, and the extent to which these symptoms can impair quality of life should not be underestimated.

“We hear of far too many people whose lives are blighted not only by their epilepsy, but also by the drugs they are prescribed to treat it,” said Hilary Mounfield, Chair of the European Committee of the International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) which carried out the survey. “People with epilepsy – and their physicians – need to be more aware that finding it hard to concentrate, and feeling sleepy and sluggish have a major impact on peoples' lives, so it is important that their condition is being managed optimally.”

A total of 56% of responders associated their cognitive impairment with their epilepsy medication, with 45-50% identifying work, education, leisure activities, and family and relationships as being the areas that particularly suffered as a consequence. Problems such as the inability to recall names

and faces, or access memories, were often reported, with slowness of thought preventing people with epilepsy from completing their education, or securing rewarding jobs, and from fulfilling basic tasks such as remembering a shopping list, or a friend's telephone number:

“I have lost confidence in public speaking (I used to teach science), knowing that I will have difficulty finding the words I want to use.”

“My initial medication brought very severe side effects and considerably affected my ability to function. I have great mood swings and excessive tiredness, and I essentially 'lost' 6 months of my schooling.”

The survey asked 425 people with epilepsy in Belgium, Malta, Ireland, Scotland and Denmark about the effects of their epilepsy and its treatment on their 'cognitive function' – their ability to learn and think – how sleepy and sluggish they felt, and their quality of life. Other key findings from the survey were:

- 44% found it moderately or very difficult to learn something new
- 45% felt they were moderately or very slow thinkers
- 59% reported they often felt moderately or very sleepy or tired
- 48% felt moderately or very lethargic or sluggish
- 63% felt that the effects they had experienced had prevented them doing a particular activity or achieving a goal

Asked which side-effects they most wished to avoid, 38% of respondents said they wished to be free from feeling sleepy or tired as a result of their medicine, 16% wanted to get rid of memory problems and 13% wanted to be free of lethargy/ sluggishness. One in 12 wanted to be free of the weight and appetite problems that they linked to their treatment.

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References

1. Epilepsy and Cognitive Function Survey, International Bureau for Epilepsy, August 2004

*** *About IBE***

The International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) was established in 1961 as an organisation of laypersons and professionals interested in the medical and non-medical aspects of epilepsy. The IBE addresses such social problems as education, employment, insurance, driving licence restrictions and public awareness. The Bureau also works in close liaison with the International League against Epilepsy (ILAE), an organisation of medical professionals involved in the medical and scientific issues of epilepsy. IBE is funded mainly by membership dues from its chapters and by financial support from other contributors.

The International Bureau for Epilepsy provides assistance by offering international support, by creating means for worldwide exchange of information and, where possible, by setting standards which provide an international policy focus and identity for all persons with epilepsy. Much of this work is accomplished through the IBE working commissions, composed of volunteers who are experts in their subjects.

*** *About UCB Pharma***

UCB Pharma is part of the UCB Group of companies, a global pharmaceutical and specialty chemical company with headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. UCB Pharma is a leading biopharmaceutical company, specialising in the fields of central nervous system disorders, allergy and respiratory disease, immune and inflammatory disorders and oncology. UCB Pharma's key products are Keppra® (antiepileptic), Nootropil® (cerebral function regulator), Xyzal® and Zyrtec® (antiallergics), and Tussionex® (antitussive). UCB Pharma employs over 8,000 people operating in over 100 countries, and in 2003 achieved sales of €1.5 billion.

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