

Employing People with Epilepsy

Principles of Good Practice

Prepared by the IBE Employment Commission



The majority of people with epilepsy worldwide require no special help to become economically active. Sometimes, however, epilepsy presents considerable problems in getting and keeping jobs.

This leaflet sets out principles developed by the Employment Commission of the International Bureau for Epilepsy. The principles are designed to enhance the employment prospects of people with epilepsy in every country worldwide.

In setting out principles relating to employment, the Employment Commission assumes a common understanding about epilepsy and its comprehensive management.

Principles for Employing People with Epilepsy

There are four main areas in which good practice policies can ensure that employers have access to the skills and talents available in people with epilepsy and people with epilepsy can have fair access to available jobs. These are health care, job suitability, recruitment and assistance at work.

Health Care

When assessing an employee or job applicant, the employer needs to understand some of the basic facts about epilepsy and its possible impact on work performance. Important points are summarized here:

- Seizures can take several forms and many people will have one seizure at some point in their lives. In such cases a diagnosis of epilepsy is usually not made.
- Epilepsy is a physical condition of the brain. People affected by epilepsy have, at some time, had recurrent seizures. Seizures can take many forms and vary considerably in frequency and severity.
- In the majority of people, seizures can be completely controlled with appropriate therapy, usually in the form of drug treatment. Only in a minority of people will seizures continue to occur.
- Neither the diagnosis of epilepsy nor the actual occurrence of seizures should disqualify a person from paid employment.
- In the minority of cases where restrictions on particular types of employment are necessary, such decisions must be based on fair and individual assessments of both the demands of the work chosen and of the person with epilepsy concerned. Otherwise such restrictions are discriminatory.
- All people with epilepsy should have equal opportunities to gain access to available health care, rehabilitation and vocational programmes, and social support services to gain maximum control over their disorder and to maximize their chances of employment.
- In job seeking, selection, and employment, people with epilepsy should enjoy the same rights as other workers.
- When a seizure occurs for the first time there may be a detrimental effect on self-confidence, and the person may require psychological support and education about epilepsy.
- In most cases, recurrent seizures can be completely controlled with appropriate therapy. This usually consists of treatment with antiepileptic drugs that need to be taken on a regular basis, often for several years.
- Antiepileptic drugs, if prescribed properly, should not produce any side effects that have a noticeable effect on work performance.
- In only a minority of people will seizures occur at work or will prescribed antiepileptic drugs impair work performance.

- In such cases, assessment by a physician expert in epilepsy will often improve seizure control and reduce these side effects.
- Sickness absence and accidents at work are no more frequent in people with epilepsy than in other workers.
- Employees with epilepsy should be provided with the same insurance cover as other employees.
- Work related aptitudes and skills, and a positive adjustment to epilepsy are key factors in determining a person's employability.
- When personal health information is required, it should be processed separately from the job application form and evaluated by a skilled person.
- Interviews should focus on the capabilities of the individual with epilepsy and not on his or her real or assumed limitations.
- Suitability for a particular job should be decided by the employer before any implications arising from the job applicant's epilepsy are considered.
- If a medical opinion is sought for an applicant's suitability, the guidance given should be based on acknowledge of the particular job and details of the individual's epilepsy.

Job suitability

The vast majority of jobs are suitable for people with epilepsy. Where a person with epilepsy possesses the right qualifications and experience, job suitability should normally be assumed. Implementation of the following policies should ensure that no unnecessary restrictions are imposed.

- When medical advice is sought about the suitability of particular jobs for people with epilepsy, the guidance given should take into account the requirements of the job and the known facts about epilepsy and seizures.
- Blanket prohibitions should be avoided.
- In those jobs known to carry a high degree of physical risk to the individual workers or to others, the organization of work practice should be examined to reduce this potential risk to an acceptable level. Only in those situations in which this cannot be achieved are restrictions on the employment of people with epilepsy justified.

Recruitment and selection

It is easy to discriminate against people with epilepsy unintentionally. The following policies should ensure that recruitment and selection procedures are fair:

Assistance at work

- When seizures occur for the first time in an employee, the employer should respond fairly by giving the employee adequate opportunity to receive proper medical treatment before making any decisions about job suitability.
- If seizures are likely to occur at work, the employer should help the employee with epilepsy to disclose the epilepsy to workmates.
- Some first aid training or other information should be provided for those who might be involved should a seizure occur.
- If any special job restrictions are needed, there should be clearly stated policies about how they are to be implemented, reviewed, or lifted in terms of set time periods.
- If, despite proper medical attention, redeployment to another job is necessary, appropriate vocational guidance and rehabilitation services should be made available at an early stage.

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