

TELLING MY EPILEPSY STORY FROM CODEF CAMEROON

BY Bessong Takang Eyang Obasi Praise

My epilepsy originated as a result of falling and hitting my head at the age of one year six months. This marked my first experience with epilepsy. This health condition negatively affected my psychology and reasoning capacity where I could not lead a normal life like my age mates or other people I could see around. As time went on I became aware that I was not as healthy as my brothers and sisters. Whenever I was to experience seizures I will start feeling dizzy, my right hand will be jerking and I may fall unto the ground. I will go unconscious during the crisis and become conscious thereafter. I could also feel some internal vibrations within me where I will start crying unconsciously. These signs and symptoms would intensify whenever I was stressed up.

The signs and symptoms could diagnose epilepsy but were "Warning signals" to me that gave me a mastery of my epilepsy. This helped me a lot as I could know when I was to have seizures and will not go out of home or to the public until the day I feel am fine. This way I prevented myself from having burns and wounds during epilepsy crisis. I was first consulted and given epilepsy treatment when I was 05 years old in l'hopital Generale in Douala. My condition started improving. But my anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) or treatment and other tests like scanning costed my parents a lot of money. They were spending more than US\$600 or 300,000FCFA per month:

Epilepsy brought me low self-esteem, lack of confidence, stigmatization, abandonment, traumatization and demoralization a lot. For instance, at one moment I felt like my parents were wasting their money on me; whereas they could have rather used it on something else productive than throwing it away in the hospital. My mother could not withstand the scene. My Mum would prefer staying out the whole day to later return home in the evening when she suspects that I might have recovered from the epilepsy crisis.

Socially, I saw myself as an outcast in society because at one time I could feel like not being capable and not qualified but that I was a "good for nothing thing" - useless in life. My great ambitions and future plans were all shattered by epilepsy. My junior sister could study their subjects well plus mine and would answer questions so excellent in my subjects than I could do. I was in class 4 and my kid sister was in class 2 in primary school. My parents restricted me from doing household chores like fetching water, carrying out manual labour like clearing. They even banned me from sporting activities.

I was barred from eating Okra and snails for my mother wrongly thought these could provoke epilepsy crisis. It was in an absurdity manner that epilepsy crisis affected my menses and menstrual cycle. So I was terribly worried and began to ponder whether I would ever get married, have my own children, complete my education and be employed to have a job. But I meticulously took my anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs), do my hospital routine checks and the doctor changed my AEDs from Depakin Chrono 500mg to Tegretol LP 200mg in Centre Pasteur hospital Yaounde. Today there is a huge improvement on my seizure and frequency levels. This has made me proud as am in the university currently studying English Modern Letter.