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Occupational health challenges in patients with seizure disorders – experiences from a tertiary hospital in Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

People with chronic diseases may be disadvantaged at participation in the workforce. This study aimed to describe the employment statuses of patients with epilepsy and to identify the prevalence of potential occupational health barriers and challenges.

Methods

Interviews were conducted on 394 patients attending epilepsy and epilepsy surgery outpatient clinics at King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center. Employment status and potentially unsuitable working arrangmeents were examined in relation to socioeconomic indicators, seizure types and healthcare provider counseling.

Results

Out of 171 participants who were unemployed (43% of total sample), 32% reported they were not able to find a job, 49% reported they were not well enough to work, and 18% did not desire to work. Seizure type was not related to reason for unemployment.

Thirty (21%) out of 143 employed participants were currently working in potentially unsuitable arrangements (involving heavy machinery, working at heights, working with dangerous substances, working in night or rotating shifts), however 37% of these only experienced partial seizures, 16% only experienced seizures while asleep, and 11% had generalized seizures but had been seizure-free for the last 6 months.

Twenty-one percent of total participants reported that they had experienced a seizure while at work. Around 5% of participants reported seizures that resulted in injuries or fatalties to themselves or other persons, and 1.5% reported seizures resulting in property damage.

Around half of employed participants reported that their employers made special arrangements at work due to their condition, and 48% had requested a medical report from

their physicians for purposes related to employment. Fifty-six percent of participants working in potentially unsuitable arrangements had been asked about their occupation by their physicians.

Conclusion

Patients with seizure disorders are at increased risk of unemployment. There is a need to increase awareness about workplace safety among patients and their employers, and to ensure that appropriate occupational advice and supports are available.

Biography

Dr. Rana Saleh is an internal medicine resident at King Abdulaziz Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. She obtained her medical degree from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and then completed a masters in public health at the Univeristy College Dublin, Ireland.

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