

REDUCING PREJUDICE AND IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF EPILEPSY

Discrimination and epilepsy in Thailand

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There have been various studies showing patients with chronic epilepsy have to face interpersonal difficulties, emotional problems and social discrimination. In Thailand, owing to the lack of information for the whole country, the exact status of the problem of discrimination is uncertain. If under-diagnosis and inadequate treatment of epilepsy is a reflection of discrimination, a proportion of Thai epilepsy patients do face these difficulties. Under-diagnosis and inadequate treatment of epilepsy is of course also due to inadequate number of adult and pediatric neurologists, inadequate supply of first-line antiepileptic drugs in the community hospitals, and lack of facilities to investigate the etiology.

Previous study on awareness of epilepsy among school teachers in Thailand found that 47% of the respondents believed that epilepsy was a chronic incurable disease, and 15% preferred to place all children with epilepsy in a special classroom, showing inadequate understanding of epilepsy among Thai school teachers.¹ In a pilot hospital-based survey of adolescents with epilepsy, 26 % and 40 % of the respondents reported concerns in inadequate self-confidence and school performance respectively. Twenty-three percent

of the respondents dared not tell their friends of their illness or preferred to avoid others know that they had epilepsy², reflecting the problem of discrimination among Thai children with epilepsy.

Discrimination may be reduced by the Government's health insurance, creation of guidelines for management of epilepsy, and improving the knowledge of epilepsy among health care professionals. These measures will help to improve seizure control and thus quality of life and discrimination of the patients. Public education to correct the misunderstanding of the disease is also important. Research on public understanding and attitude towards epilepsy, and quality of life of epilepsy patients will also help to clarify the extent of the problem of discrimination in this country.

REFERENCES

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