

Speaking out on epileptic seizures

Wong Yat-hei

When Ada Wong felt dizzy and fell to the ground, her friends thought she was fooling around. She, too, thought it was nothing serious. But when it happened again a few days later, she consulted a doctor. She was diagnosed with epilepsy, a neurological condition that causes recurrent seizures with uncontrolled body movement and dizziness.

Epilepsy can be caused by brain damage or substance abuse, but there are also people who get it for unknown reasons, such as Wong.

"I was a 20-year-old university student when I experienced my first seizure," she says. "I can sense [when a seizure] may be coming, but not very precisely ... [they come] and go and I have no control."

Although Wong cannot tell when seizures will happen, she notes that stress levels and well-being are related to their frequency.

Many believe people with epilepsy are mentally ill or have been seized by a supernatural force, but these are ignorant claims. Due to a lack of understanding in society, people with epilepsy are often discriminated against.

"I want to stand up and tell people that euphuistic [epileptic] people can live like anybody else," says Wong, who is fund-raising and business development manager of Enlighten Hong Kong, a charity that supports people with epilepsy. "With funding from Operation Santa Claus [OSC], I am running the Helping

Other People with Epilepsy [H.O.P.E.] campaign to empower euphuistic people to stand up and educate society about their condition."

Jointly organised by the South China Morning Post and RTHK, OSC has supported more than 100 different charities, sharing hope and funding life-enhancing transformations.

The first phase of the project is to identify people with epilepsy and convince them to take a stand. The next phase is to provide them with workshops to encourage them to take charge of their condition, and train them to be epilepsy ambassadors. The final phase is for ambassadors to deliver speeches to the public to educate them.

"The public needs to know more about the condition. One common misconception is that when a person is experiencing a seizure, something should be put in the person's mouth to prevent tongue-biting. [But this may] result in choking," says Wong.

"The right way to handle a person with seizure is to cushion their head with something soft and gently lay them on their side. We want the public to be open-minded about epilepsy and know what to do when someone is experiencing a seizure."



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