



Enlighten - Action for Epilepsy fund-raising manager Ada Wong says the illness "is neither contagious nor a mental disease. It is a brain condition that can happen to anyone". Photo: Jonathan Wong

CAMPAIGN OF HOPE AIMS TO DISPEL MYTHS OF EPILEPSY

A group to benefit from the Operation Santa Claus fund-raising drive wants to highlight cases and change the way the community views the illness



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Ada Wong Wai-ka started suffering from epilepsy 10 years ago while she was a university student in Canada.

"The doctors were unable to determine why I developed the illness," said Wong, who is now the manager for fund-raising and business development with the group Enlighten - Action for Epilepsy.

In the decade since she was diagnosed, Wong has gone through a lot of emotional struggles. "I lost all confidence and refused to have any hope," she said.

"I did not want my friends to know I had epilepsy. But I accepted it later, because I am a Christian and started to realise it was God's gift so that I could help others."

Given her own experience of epileptic seizures, Wong fully understands the situation faced by other epilepsy patients. "Many of those with epilepsy live in silence - because they are misunderstood as having mental problems," she said. "Epilepsy is neither contagious nor a mental disease. It is a brain condition that can happen to anyone at any age."

"Some people are discriminated against, especially by employers, after they are discovered to have the illness. And sometimes, when people want to protect them, it can result in overprotection."

One of the most common misunderstandings about an epileptic is that a spoon should be put into their mouth when they have seizures, to prevent them from biting or swallowing their tongue. Instead, Wong said,

people should cushion the victim's head with something soft, gently lay them on their side and reassure them that they are safe.

Set up in 2002, Enlighten - Action for Epilepsy is the city's only non-medical charity for epileptics. It focuses on education programmes for children and teenagers. The organisation wants to expand its work to cover adults, and eventually

to change the way society views people with epilepsy.

The group has designed a campaign, Helping Other People with Epilepsy (Hope), which aims to empower epilepsy patients who live in silence, unwilling to talk about their condition. It plans to make such people's experiences more widely known, with the goal of changing social attitudes.

The Hope campaign is a beneficiary of this year's Operation Santa Claus (OSC) fund-raising drive. OSC is an annual campaign jointly organ-

ised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK. It will raise funds for 16 Hong Kong-based charities whose work provides timely assistance to the needy in Hong Kong and on the mainland. Since its launch in 1988, OSC has supported more than 100 charities.

"We hope every participant will spread the message to at least 20 other people, and that in the end we can change cultural attitudes," Wong said. "I hope eventually it will be the same as, 'Hey, I have diabetes'. No one regards diabetics as abnormal."

HOW YOU CAN GIVE

- Donate online by credit card at osc.scmp.com
- Donations can be made at ATMs or at any branch of HSBC: account number 502-676299-001 for SCMP CHARITIES LTD-OPERATION SANTA CLAUS
- You can make a donation by cheque, payable to "SCMP CHARITIES LTD-OPERATION SANTA CLAUS" and mail to: Operation Santa Claus, Morning Post Centre, 22 Dai Fat Street, Tai Po Industrial Estate, New Territories, Hong Kong
- Donations of HK\$100 or more are tax-deductible. For a tax receipt, send the completed donation form and original bank receipt with your name, address and phone number to the address above.
- Contact us via e-mail at osc@scmp.com, telephone 2680 8159 or visit us online at osc.scmp.com