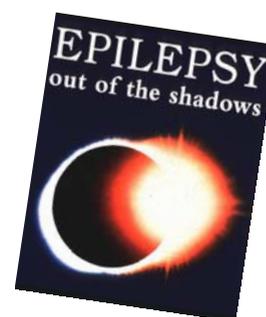


Global Campaign Against Epilepsy

Public Awareness Campaign in Georgia

Report by Natela Okujava and Sofia Kasradze



In 2008 the important initiative “Epilepsy Management at Primary Health Care Level” was launched as a Demonstration Project of the ILAE/IBE/WHO Global Campaign Against Epilepsy in Georgia. The Global Campaign Secretariat is responsible for the project, which is supported by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs and the Parliament of Georgia. Its execution was delegated to the Centre for Epilepsy Management, Research and Education (CEMRE) and the Centre of Epilepsy Control and Prevention (CPCE) in Georgia.

The local management team comprises Prof Otar Toidze (Principal Investigator), Prof Natela Okujava (Principal Investigator) and Dr Sofia Kasradze (Senior Researcher). At international level the project is managed by Ms Hanneke de Boer (Global Campaign Against Epilepsy, SEIN), Dr Tarun Dua (WHO), Prof Ley Sander (Scientific Leader). The project is based in Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi and will run for four years, to 2011.

The principal aim is to promote public awareness about epilepsy by means of an educational programme aimed at the community and at specific target groups in order to reduce stigma. An awareness campaign in Georgia was planned during the first technical meeting of the project committee in Tbilisi in June 2008 and its execution is discussed regularly.

So-called ‘Inclusive Schools’ were chosen as the target group for a special educational program. These schools are open to both healthy children and those with special needs, including children with epilepsy, and all are educated

together. There are 10 such schools in Tbilisi. Preliminary meetings with the representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Management of the Inclusive Schools revealed high interest for such an educational campaign and a readiness for cooperation. Teaching booklets for inclusive schools and leaflets for community intervention were developed. An educational program for teachers, psychologists

and parents was introduced in the inclusive schools. Meetings with local authorities, the national WHO office, nongovernmental organizations and representatives of local media were arranged, in order to develop and promote public awareness activities.

The most important activities of the campaign are described briefly:

- The Demonstration Project was presented at the Mental Health and Psychological Support Sub-cluster Coordination Meeting in the WHO Country Office, where the problem of raising public awareness on epilepsy was stressed once more. The event was organized with the support of the National WHO Office.
- Within the framework of the Disability Forum, supported by USAID, the play “Snow Queen” was performed by a cast comprising both healthy and special needs children, including children with epilepsy. The event was organized in collaboration with the Neuropsychological Department of the Epilepsy Prevention and Control Centre (CPCE).
- June 2009 - Printed materials (teaching booklets for inclusive schools and information pamphlets for community intervention) were made available at the Exhibition of Informational Materials on Disability. This was organised by the “Coalition for Independent Living” with financial support from USAID.
- The Demonstration Project was presented at the “8th International Medical Summer Conference” in Kobuleti, Georgia and the printed materials were exhibited in the ex-

hibition hall of the conference.

- July 2009 – the Experts Group for the Development of Inclusive Education in Georgia was formed at the Ministry of Education. Experts from the Demonstration Project were invited to participate, in order to optimize inclusive education for children with epilepsy and to discuss psycho-social and legal problems of epilepsy in Georgia. The first result of the work of this group is the development and implementation of the “Protocol for Inclusion of People with Epilepsy in National Examination’s for Higher Schools”. Measures for the creation of optimal conditions for people with epilepsy during national educational examinations were undertaken (including permission to take medication during an exam; choosing the optimal time for an exam; taking into account chronobiology of seizures etc.). Training of national examination staff in the delivery of first aid in the event of a seizure was conducted.
- Printed materials were widely disseminated in the community of Tbilisi. Medical and non-medical institutions were chosen as target groups, as these are places where people often wait and may have time to read the pamphlets. As a result, the pamphlets have been disseminated in poli-clinics, in obstetric poli-clinics and in hairdressing salons. This initiative has been very successful.

The major achievement of our campaign is a really fruitful cooperation with a number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and groups of professionals. Therefore we hope that the Public Awareness Campaign in Georgia will successfully develop further.

Acknowledgments: We express gratitude to the following organizations: Ministry of Education of Georgia, WHO Country Office, USAID, and Coalition for Independent Living. We express special gratitude to the Neuropsychological Department of the Epilepsy Prevention and Control Centre and leader Prof Tamara Gagoshidze.

Photo above, from left: Sofia Kasradze, Natela Okujava, Hanneke de Boer, Ley Sander and Tarun Dua.