

Informed epileptics can lead normal life

By LINDA ASHLEY

Epilepsy is a dark word. It is the mysterious disorder that is whispered about, hidden and seems to mean something different in the back of every person's mind.

It is these myths and misconceptions about the disorder that may handicap a child with epilepsy more than his own symptoms, according to Dr. Henry Baird of Philadelphia.

Dr. Baird specializes in treating children with epilepsy and wrote "The Child with Convulsions," a practical guide for parents and teachers.

"I'd like to see the child with convulsions have more opportunities and his family give him the support he needs to use those opportunities," said Baird speaking at the annual meeting of the Epilepsy Center of Michigan, a Torch Drive service.

"The seizures are a very small part of the overall problem," said Baird. "Teaching the child and family to live with the disease and not in fear of it is also part of successful treatment."

BAIRD DEFINED epilepsy simply as a recurrent loss of consciousness. The loss of consciousness is also called a convulsion or seizure or fit. The person may have nothing more than a brief attention lapse without any memory of it or get up from a

chair and walk across the room or jerk his arms and legs violently.

About two million people in the United States have epilepsy in some form, according to Tom Caughlin, director of community services for the Epilepsy Center.

"It is difficult to know, for sure, who has epilepsy," Caughlin said. "Our figure is conservative. We estimate epilepsy exists in about one in 20 families and affects between 35 to 40,000 people in the tri-county area."

"WE HAVE contact with about 5,000 a year either directly or indirectly," he added.

"Cases range from the most mild to the most complicated and debilitating," Caughlin said.

The best controlled cases are the least known, both Caughlin and Baird point out, because the individuals live normally blending into the scene and telling few people about the problem.

Baird described some of his own most successful patients, two doctors, a lawyer, a steeplejack and a jockey.

"WE'D LIKE to show these cases as a model to children with convulsions who think they're limited," he said, "but I'd say that aside from me and their druggist, no one knows they have epilepsy."

"As long as the prejudices against epilepsy continue it's doubtful that these people should make their condition known," he said.

According to Baird 99 out of 100 children subject to seizures will go through life just fine and under control, assuming they have no severe developmental handicaps in addition to epilepsy but additional handicaps do happen.

"You tend to hear more about the controlled cases than the severe," said one Oakland County mother.

"EPILEPSY was no more than a word before it happened to us," she said, "but the more severe the problem the more you have to know about it and it's hard for parents to get good information."

Group sets symposium

The Spina Bifida Association of Michigan and the Metropolitan Detroit Chapter of March of Dimes will co-sponsor a "Multidiscipline Symposium—The Child with Spina Bifida and their Family" at 8 a.m. Saturday at Children's Hospital, Detroit.

Spina Bifida is a birth defect of new born babies where the spinal tissues have not fused, causing an opening in the spine and paralysis of the children's legs.

In Michigan, more than 200 children are born each year suffering from spina bifida. It is estimated that three out of every 1,000 newborn babies have the birth defect.

The day-long symposium will offer two workshops dealing with the development, handling and care of the spina bifida Child and

Her son, who has had epilepsy for seven years and is now a teenager, has several kinds of seizures as often as 50 times a day.

"You can't wait until the child is older to tell him about epilepsy. You feed out the information as you go along, gearing it to each age level."

"My son's emotional adjustment is far better than I thought it would be. If I can keep him emotionally well adjusted through all of this, I will feel successful," she said.

In such severe cases with complications, the child is given a number of drugs to achieve control of his seizures.

Personality changes occur with changing use of medication and school is often missed.

"THIS CAUSES great frustration and sometimes makes the parents wonder just who the child is underneath it all," she said.

Dr. Ernst Rodin, medical director of the Epilepsy Center commented, "Any general statement about 'the epileptic' is wrong. Each person with convulsions is an individual and must be treated as an individual. Every case is different."

There is a new facility at the Epilepsy Center to aid the physician in treating his patient with anti-convulsant medication. Opened last month, it is called PALS, Patient Anti-Convulsant Levels Service.

New laboratory equipment can determine the anti-convulsant medication levels in the blood through a small sample from the patient. This determines if anti-epileptic drugs are in a person's blood at their proper levels.

IT CAN AID when proper medication is difficult to find, when there are undesirable side effects or when medication doesn't seem to be working possibly because the patient is not really taking it.

"We are hoping this will aid in determining new combinations of drugs for our children," said one parent.

the effect and growing processes for the child and family. Speakers will address themselves to the areas of care for the newborn, teenagers with spina bifida and the stresses on the family of handicapped children.

There will be an open discussion and a parent panel to inform on the assistance, educational needs and resources available to parents of the birth defect children.

Saturday will also be the day for the state meeting of the Spina Bifida Association of Michigan. All those interested in attending the symposium should contact the March of Dimes Office at 864-6000. There is a fee for professionals but it is waived for students and parents of spina bifida Children.

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Sorority to convene

Nearly 400 women representing Michigan's 71 Alpha Delta Kappa Chapters will be in Ann Arbor Friday through Sunday for the biennial state convention of Alpha Delta Kappa, an international honorary society of women educators.

Attending from the Birmingham-Troy area are members of Gamma Beta, Mu, Xi, Alpha Lambda and Alpha Upsilon chapters.

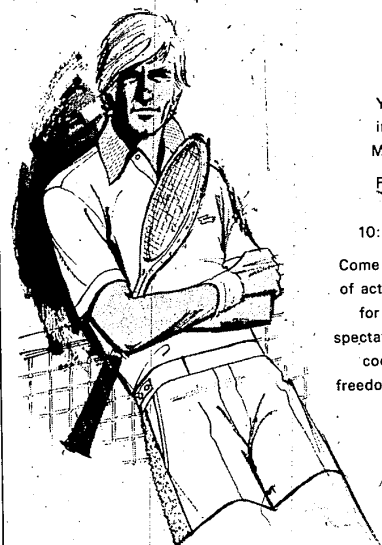
Convention activities begin Friday evening with registration and refreshments in the Holiday Inn West, Ann Arbor.

Keynoting the Saturday morning business meeting is Stella Peniston, past grand president of Alpha Delta Kappa from Shawnee, Okla.

Mary Coleman, Michigan Supreme Court Justice, will be Saturday's luncheon meeting speaker. She is a state honorary member of Alpha Delta Kappa.

During a special Sunday morning service, members will honor Michigan sisters whose deaths have occurred during the past year.

State Alpha Delta Kappa President, Geraldine Frasco, will preside over a series of business and workshop sessions during the three-day convention which concludes with the installation of newly elected officers.



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