Epilepsy

Definition

Epilepsy is a disruption of the normal electrical activity of the brain that results in seizures. Under certain circumstances anyone can have a seizure. It is only when there is a tendency to have recurrent seizures that epilepsy is diagnosed.

Learners may have partial seizures, also known as 'focal seizures'. These seizures can often be subtle or unusual and may go unnoticed or be mistaken for anything from intoxication to daydreaming.

'Generalised seizures' are the result of abnormal activity in the whole brain simultaneously. Because of this, consciousness is lost at the onset of this type of seizure.

If a student has identified as having epilepsy and is likely, or possibly going to have a seizure in the classroom, then it's important that the teaching staff have received a copy of any seizure management plans in place and understand how to respond from a first aid perspective.

Impact on training and assessment

There are many factors which can vary the impact that epilepsy has on a learner's educational experience. Some learners may have mild impairment with minimal effect on their access to, participation in and outcomes for education. Others may have severe impairment and experience more significant challenges.

Learners who have epilepsy may experience difficulties with:

- concentration;
- information retention;
- cognitive functioning;
- memory and motor skills;
- visual or verbal learning;
- reading and spelling;
- problem solving;
- attendance as a result of seizures.

Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student with epilepsy will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

Presenting and communicating information

- Ask the learner what they would like you to do if they have a seizure in the learning environment.
- Check that the learning environment has appropriate lighting for the learner's needs.
- Use a white board or OHT for writing key points.
- Provide written material in a clear and concise form.
- Always use plain English and check the learner's understanding.
- Repeat information and instructions for preparing assignments.
- Make sure the learner is not put on the spot by being targeted to do things they feel uncomfortable doing. This may assist to keep their anxiety levels down.
- Ensure the learner has regular breaks in extended training sessions.
- Assist the learner to set realistic goals.

Utilising technology to maximize student engagement

- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.

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- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html.

- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.

- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organizing. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment

- Offer oral assessments as an alternative.

- Provide extra time for the learner to formulate, write or check answers, if required.

- Arrange extensions to assessment deadlines if learner is taking strong medication.

- Arrange rest breaks if test conditions cause anxiety.

- Check that the assessment location is suitable to the learner's needs e.g. quiet, well ventilated and appropriately lit.

References

- Epilepsy Action Australia, www.epilepsy.org.au

Further Resources

- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training, http://www.adcet.edu.au/

- Epilepsy Queensland inc, www.epilepsyqueensland.com.au

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