



Ministero della Salute

Statement on the Need for a Coordinated Action to Address the Burden of Epilepsy

WHO Executive Board Meeting, Geneva 26 January – 3 February 2015

Mr Chair, Distinguished member of EB, Director General,

Italy fully supports the Report of the WHO Secretariat and the adoption of the draft resolution presented by Maldives, People's Republic of China and Russian Federation.

On behalf of the Italian Minister of Health, and taking into account the expectations of healthcare professionals and of the whole community of people with epilepsy in Italy, I wish express my deep appreciation for the inclusion of epilepsy in the agenda of the 136th Executive Board meeting. We are confident that this initiative will stimulate a coordinated action to address the needs of people with epilepsy worldwide.

There are many relevant reasons to support this action:

- 40% of people with epilepsy in high-income countries, and over 75% of those who live in low-income countries, do not receive appropriate treatment, despite the fact that the majority of them could be successfully managed with very modest costs;
- epilepsy is associated with many comorbidities, including depression and cognitive impairment, and with a 2-to 3-fold increase in premature mortality risk, including an up to 37-fold increase in mortality for people with epilepsy who live in low-income countries;
- 30% of people with epilepsy do not respond to currently available treatments, which underlines the need for research into the discovery of more effective therapies;
- epilepsy carries high costs to individuals and to society. in Italy alone, which is home to 500,000 people with epilepsy, the healthcare expenditure for epilepsy has been estimated conservatively at

EUR 2.3 billion per year. This does not take into account indirect costs, such as those related to underemployment or premature death.

These facts are compounded by poor awareness and understanding among the general public, resulting in people with epilepsy suffering from social isolation, discrimination and inability to live a full and productive life. In fact, epilepsy is largely neglected by the public: people with epilepsy are "invisible" and their life is often devastated more by the adverse social environment than by the manifestations of the disease.

We recognize that the burden of epilepsy should be best addressed through national healthcare plans to optimize practices and resources and to improve outcomes for people with epilepsy and their families. Also in our own country, further actions and initiatives have to be adopted at the level of legislation, for example on matters such as the administration of medicines at school, which is currently left to the discretion and willingness of school administrators and staff.

At global level, the Italian Ministry of Health supports the development of actions aimed at boosting effective interventions against epilepsy at country level and is looking forward to facilitating prompt implementation of such actions.

I am confident that what is happening today can contribute to change in coming years the lives of 50 million people with epilepsy throughout the world.

I thank you all for your attention.