

Dr Alasdair Allan MSP
Speaking at the Epilepsy and Occupational Health Guide Reception, Scottish Parliament (2011)

As Co-convenor of the Cross-Party Group, I'm very pleased that this evening we are launching this guide, *Epilepsy and Occupational health, a good practice guide for employers*. I think it fills an important gap in the understanding of employers about how to deal with the issue of epilepsy but also, I hope, provides a good foundation for the rights of people with epilepsy in the workplace as well.

I would like to say before we go any further that personally I'm very interested in this issue. In speaking to a lot of people with epilepsy - I have epilepsy myself, although it's controlled by medication - this is one of the areas where they feel most anxious, explaining to an employer, or even worse a potential employer, that they have epilepsy.

I can't speak for anyone else but my own experience has been mixed. I can remember a summer job where I had a seizure. And it was made very plain to me by my employer, possibly for reasons unrelated to my seizure, that he had concerns about my mental health, and showed a certain lack of understanding about what epilepsy was. I would like to think that these things are less frequent than they were.

A happier experience was when I first worked as a young researcher for the SNP. As some of you have probably heard, on the very first day I arrived for an interview with the-then Chief Executive, Mike Russell who was then Education Secretary. In the midst of my job interview I had a seizure.

Mike Russell being the spin doctor that he was, and under the belief initially that I had died, was busy trying to cope with possible press interest in this, until he realised that I hadn't! I did get the job I'm happy to say, and I hope that more and more employers are understanding about epilepsy and show a greater willingness to learn where they are perhaps lacking in information.

I would just like to say that this evening we have a distinguished range of speakers. Representing Epilepsy Scotland, we have their Chief Executive Lesslie Young, we have Dr Freddie Westbrook from Serco, Chief Inspector Ross Bennett from Fife Constabulary, Chief Executive Hilary Todd of the Society of Occupational Medicine and when she arrives we will have the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, who is on her way from another meeting.

It is really just left for me now to say how pleased I am to welcome you all to the Parliament and to introduce the first of those five speakers, Lesslie Young. I hope you will all show Lesslie a warm welcome.