

Hilary Todd, Chief Executive, Society of Occupational Medicine

Speaking at the Epilepsy and Occupational Health Guide Reception, Scottish Parliament (2011)

Thank you for inviting me to the launch of this new booklet *Epilepsy and Occupational Health*. Although I sound like a Sassenach, my paternal roots are here in Scotland and I am delighted and honoured to be here.

Occupational health is concerned with keeping people well at work and one of the key messages for us at the Society of Occupational Medicine is that work is generally good for your health and mental wellbeing. There is now good evidence to show this.

The positive links between work and health do need to be understood and recognised by all of us. For most people work is a key factor in their self-worth, family esteem and identity - if people are not able to be in work because of sickness or a medical condition and are not helped quickly enough, they can all too easily find themselves on a downward spiral into long-term sickness and a life on benefits

So what does this mean for epilepsy? – part of this is creating a culture in the workplace where health conditions, such as epilepsy, are not a bar to enjoying the benefits of work. This means raising awareness about what epilepsy is, dispelling some of the myths that are associated with the condition and supporting employers in employing people with epilepsy.

The core business of occupational health doctors is work and health. They are involved with working with both employers and employees to ensure the health and well being of the working population. They do this by helping to prevent work related ill health, advising on fitness for work and suggesting appropriate adjustments in the workplace to help people stay in work.

It's a big job and I'm delighted that this new resource – *Epilepsy and Occupational Health* – has been developed to assist them and the employers with whom they work.

This new booklet is going to be a valuable tool for occupational health doctors to give to employers:

- It sets out a useful framework to help ensure that wherever possible people with epilepsy can be employed, remain in work and be safe at work.
- It will help our members, occupational health doctors, work with and educate employers about the key issues surrounding epilepsy.
- Key issues range from the employer's responsibilities, ensuring that there is a risk assessment and appropriate and reasonable workplace adjustments are made and confidentiality issues.

But perhaps more importantly – I believe this new booklet will be a useful communication tool that can ensure some of the important conversations take place.

For example, open discussions with the person with epilepsy. No two people are the same, so asking questions about the person's seizure type and any trigger they may have can be really useful. Occupational health doctors, with the help of this booklet, can ensure some of these basic but vital conversations take place.

Workers are a key asset for any business. The Society of Occupational Medicine believes that everyone of working age and every employer should have access to specialist occupational health advice. However, at the moment, only a minority do have access, with specialist support being particularly limited for people employed by small and medium sized enterprises. I believe that this booklet will also be of enormous benefit to those people – the challenge for all of us is getting it out to these businesses and employers and ensuring it is read and used.

Thank you for your time – and for inviting me to speak on this important occasion. On behalf of the Society, I thank Epilepsy Scotland for producing the booklet and I know that our members will find it a useful resource to help employers better understand epilepsy and how it can be managed in the workplace.