

Epilepsy Scotland Press Release: Embargo: 0.01 27 March 2009
Good Practice Guide for Later Life Epilepsy Time Bomb

A new Good Practice Guide will help doctors identify signs of epilepsy which otherwise could be missed in the 17 older Scots having a first seizure each week. Few medics realise that later life is most likely time to develop this common condition. Hundreds of people aged 65 and over now go undiagnosed. New guidelines are being sent to every GP and A&E in Scotland to help them recognise potential symptoms.

Chief Executive Lesslie Young explained: "Scotland has an aging population. You are at greater risk of developing epilepsy the longer you live. It is more likely when you are 65 and over than at any other time in your life. It is not an easy condition to diagnose so if you faint, have a funny turn, blackout or know someone who has you should contact your GP so epilepsy can be ruled out. The 'Epilepsy in Later Life - A Good Practice Guide' will help your GP or hospital consultant to make you aware of the things to look out for."

Epilepsy Scotland, who produced the guide for the working group led by Consultant in Acute Elderly Medicine, Andrew Elder, said current numbers of older people developing epilepsy are set to rise by 50 per cent. By 2030, at least 25 new cases of later life epilepsy are expected a week as the nation's population continues to age. This figure may possibly be higher for the over 75s who are most at risk of developing the condition.

Consultant Andrew Elder said: "The good news is the majority of older people become seizure-free with accurate diagnosis and treatment. It's important that healthcare professionals can access clear guidance for the diagnosis and management of this group of patients. We hope they will more often think of epilepsy as a possible cause of 'funny turns' and address the other problems that frequently co-exist. We hope our new Good Practice Guide goes some way to achieving that."

Ends

Notes to editor

1. Epilepsy Scotland works with people living with epilepsy to ensure that their voice is heard. We campaign for improved healthcare, better information provision and an end to stigma. This common serious neurological condition affects one in 130 people. We represent nearly 40,000 people with epilepsy in Scotland, their families and carers. Our freephone Helpline (**0808 800 2200**) offers advice, support and information. People can email (enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk), text **07786 209501**, or download information from our website: www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk
2. Scotland has an increasing population of older people. Over the next 20 years the number of people aged 65 plus will increase by 47%. Proportionately the biggest rises will happen in the oldest age groups, with those aged 65-84 rising by 40 per cent and the over 85s by 104 per cent.
3. More older people means more epilepsy because epilepsy is more common in later life. However, often it can go undiagnosed or be mistaken for other conditions with similar symptoms. This guide is necessary to increase medical and social awareness of epilepsy in older people. It will help the general public and carers to become aware of epilepsy so they can recognise possible symptoms and not just put them down to 'old age'. The guide will improve diagnosis rates and aid the management of the condition, based on the best drug choices. It should lead to improved overall care of older people who have 'turns'. The Guide will be distributed to GP surgeries, A&E departments, carers' organisations, specialist and community nurses, care homes and the Care Commission.
4. There is no current national SIGN guideline for epilepsy in later life. Very little research has been carried out on epilepsy and later life and therefore it isn't possible to produce evidence-based guidelines. A panel of experts led by Dr Elder, including neurologists, specialist nurses and GPs and Epilepsy Scotland, drafted a new guideline. The Scottish Government Health Department funded a discussion event last autumn on the draft guidance.
5. For more details or a copy of the Good Practice Guide, please contact: **Emma Razi**, Policy and Development Manager on **0141 419 1700** or for a case study call **Allana Parker**, Communications Manager on: **0141 419 1701** or **07884 012 147**.