Recommendation

Provide $13 Million for the VA Epilepsy Centers of Excellence (ECoE) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023.

BACKGROUND

Veterans can acquire epilepsy and seizure disorders through a variety of means. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)— the leading form of injury or head trauma in service men and women—can cause seizures to start happening, leading to a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Epilepsy (PTE). Psychogenic Non-epileptic Seizures (PNES) are prevalent in veterans because they are caused by trauma and PTSD. While not caused by abnormal brain electrical discharges, PNES can look like epileptic seizures and are a manifestation of psychological distress.

Recognizing the need, Congress passed a law in 2008 (P.L. 110-387) directing the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish ECoE within the VA. There are now 17 sites linked to form 4 regional centers that provide specialty care and state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic services to our nation’s veterans with epilepsy and seizure disorders. This includes magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), electroencephalography (EEG), and video monitoring, as well as inpatient units for examining certain seizure types more closely, changing medications in a monitored setting, and presurgical evaluation. The ECoE are also linked with the polytrauma centers in order to better monitor veterans with moderate and severe TBI who are at the greatest risk for post-traumatic epilepsy. In FY 2021, the VA ECoE treated 84,302 unique veterans with epilepsy or seizures and 6,752 with conversion disorder with seizures.

Additional funding would enable the VA ECoE to strengthen many important areas including:

- Expanding the tele-EEG program to hopefully provide 24/7 EEG services in as many VA ECoEs as possible and focus on underserved areas;
- Expanding Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for PNES, including the training of providers to meet the increased need for this service;
- Adding ECoE sites in order to reach more veterans across the country; and
- Expanding collaboration with tele-mental health, rural health, tele-neurology, and tele-ICU.

ABOUT THE EPILEPSIES

Epilepsy is a disease or disorder of the brain which causes reoccurring seizures. It is a spectrum disease comprised of many diagnoses including an ever-growing number of rare epilepsies. There are many different types of seizures and varying levels of seizure control.

3.4 million Americans live with active epilepsy including 470,000 children and teenagers. Thirty to forty percent of people with epilepsy live with uncontrolled seizures despite available treatments. Delayed recognition of seizures and inadequate treatment increase a person’s risk of subsequent seizures, brain damage, disability, and death. Epilepsy imposes an annual economic burden of $19.4 billion on the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2021</th>
<th>$10 Million</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 in 50</td>
<td>people who have TBI will go on to develop PTE</td>
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<tr>
<td>84,302</td>
<td>veterans with Epilepsy/Seizures served by VA ECoE in FY 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>VA ECoE Sites across the U.S.</td>
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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

LAURA WEIDNER  Vice President, Government Relations & Advocacy, Epilepsy Foundation  | 301.918.3766  | lweidner@efa.org or
DALE DIRKS  President, Health and Medicine Counsel  | 202.544.7499  | DDirks@hmcw.org