

Story Idea: *African Americans and Epilepsy*

Contact: Kimberli Meadows, 301-918-3747, kmeadows@efa.org

More than 1 out of every 100 African Americans in this country has a condition that many are afraid to talk about, which causes many people to subscribe to common myths about this condition—even myths about injurious first aid for the condition.

The condition is epilepsy, and approximately 24,000 *new* cases of epilepsy are diagnosed each year among African Americans, while more than 300,000 African-Americans already have it. Lack of knowledge about the causes of epilepsy and incorrect assumptions about it (including the blatant falsehood that a person having a seizure can swallow his or her tongue) help keep epilepsy as an oft-misunderstood and highly stigmatized condition.

It is important for your audience to know that seizure-related disorders—such as epilepsy—are treatable conditions and that with proper medications or treatments—such as the Ketogenic diet, Vagus Nerve Stimulation, or surgery—people living with epilepsy can lead normal, seizure free lives.

Story Resources

- Public Service Announcement with television and film actress, Garcelle Beauvais-Nilon, of the *Jamie Foxx Show* and *NYPD Blue*.
- Collateral Materials (*available in both English and Spanish*):
 - a) *Women & Epilepsy*
 - b) *True or False: Fast Facts about Seizures and Epilepsy*
 - c) *Get the Word Out About Epilepsy*
- **The Epilepsy Index**, an educational Web resource for general epilepsy information, www.epilepsyfoundation.org/answerplace/index.cfm.

Suggested Interview Questions

- Is misdiagnosis common with regard to epilepsy?
- What causes seizures and can they be prevented?
- What simple things can safeguard children from the onset of seizures?
- What type of physician can treat epilepsy?
- If someone experiences a seizure what should be done?
- Is there a difference between epilepsy and seizure disorders?
- What is the Ketogenic diet?

- What is the Vagus Nerve Stimulator?

Fast Facts

- Of the more than 3 million Americans who have some form of epilepsy, approximately 350,000 are African American.
- African Americans account for approximately 24,000 of the 181,000 newly diagnosed cases of epilepsy each year.
- African Americans are more likely to be diagnosed with epilepsy than Caucasians.
- It is estimated that epilepsy will develop in 22 percent of stroke patients. African Americans are twice as likely to suffer from a stroke as are Caucasians or Hispanics.

Interview Opportunities

- Eric Hargis, president and CEO, the Epilepsy Foundation.
- Physician specialist.
- Denise Pease, Foundation Board Member, African American woman living with epilepsy.

About the Epilepsy Foundation

The Epilepsy Foundation, a national non-profit with affiliated organizations throughout the United States, has led the fight against epilepsy since 1968. The Foundation's goals are to ensure that people with seizures are able to participate in all life experiences; and prevent, control and cure epilepsy through services, education, advocacy and research, so not another moment is lost to seizures. For additional information, please visit www.epilepsyfoundation.org.