

AWARENESS

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Personal stories of student seizures were told firsthand at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville last week during a meeting held by the New Horizons Club. The club strives to promote an understanding of the issues concerning people with disabilities & an atmosphere of social & moral support and held this forum for students to hear about their peers' experiences with both epileptic and non-epileptic seizures.

The meeting, held at the University Club in the Morris University Center of SIUE and led by club president Emily Milano and fellow classmate Madalynn McKenzie, was an opportunity for SIUE students to learn about seizures by hearing about them from students who have experienced them. The goals of the meeting were primarily to discuss common myths about seizures, what to do if someone experiences one around you, and how you can accommodate them if the situation arises.

"I thought it was important to hold this meeting because even though I don't suffer from seizures myself, people around me do and I think it's important people know about them," Milano explained. During the forum, stories sent in by students were read aloud by Milano, as well as told firsthand to the group.

Madalynn McKenzie kicked off the sharing by students who have had seizures. McKenzie explained that she has non-epileptic seizures and experienced her first seizure on February 8th, 2021. At the time, she was administered Diazepam, a commonly used medicine to treat seizures. She then went to identify the type of seizures she has as psychogenic, which can

be described as episodes of movement, sensation, or behaviors that are like epileptic seizures but do not have a neurological origin; rather, they are somatic manifestations of psychological distress. Indeed, she went to describe stress playing a huge factor in her seizures.

“Having ambulance bills add up combined with the embarrassment I would feel during my episodes was a huge source of stress for me,” McKenzie said. She also explained the shared frustration felt by everyone who has had seizures, which is not being able to drive for six months. “Having to rely on others around for transportation was difficult as it often felt like it was taking away my social life.”

Common myths about seizures were also identified throughout the discussions. An experience read by Emily from an anonymous student explained that during a seizure- “You cannot swallow your tongue during a seizure.” An important message taken away from the meeting was the importance of contacting emergency services if someone around you is having a seizure. Another anonymous student explained “You should always call 9-1-1 unless you were specifically told beforehand to do otherwise in the event of a seizure by that person or someone they know.”

To help audience members get a better feel for what to do in this event, a demonstration was held with help from Milano and another student who shared, Cecily Colburg. With Milano laying down, Colburg emphasized the importance of protecting the head in this event, as it is at risk during a time like this.

Milano praised those in attendance for sharing their experiences and added that it matters a lot to hold discussions like this one. “You might not think that what you’re doing today means much, but it really does.”