

Today is 'Epilepsy Heroes Day' in Virginia

By ANNA MEROD
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WINCHESTER — An estimated 85,000 people in Virginia live with epilepsy, which is a medical condition that produces seizures that can impact different mental and physical functions.

About 11,000 are children. When someone has two or more seizures, they are considered to have epilepsy.

Today is "Epilepsy Heroes Day" in Virginia, which aims to "increase public knowledge about ep-

ilepsy and seizure first aid and change the way people think about epilepsy and seizures," according to a proclamation from Gov. Ralph Northam.

Dr. Paul Lyons, a Winchester Medical Center epileptologist, said there's a lot to celebrate in the advancement of treatment for epilepsy in medicine and in the state legislature.

Northam is expected to sign Senate Bill 1322 by the end of the month, which will require all state public schools to have biennial training for staff on

seizure management and action plans, effective July of 2022. The state board of education must approve and standardize the training in treatments of students with seizure disorders.

"The rationale behind this is kind of to mimic what we do for other childhood conditions," said Lyons, who specializes in epileptic pediatric care and is a major advocate for children with epilepsy and seizure disorders.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration also recently approved two new drugs for

acute treatment of seizures in patients that can be administered through a small nasal spray. This is much easier to administer to patients, particularly children, than previous existing drugs that required a suppository treatment, Lyons said.

"These two things have kind of serendipitously come together to really transform how comfortable patients can feel when they go into schools," said Lyons.

Seizures typically last 90 seconds, Lyons said, but

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they can also last hours. About one-third of children with epilepsy continue to have seizures despite any drug and medical treatments they receive.

“Our goal for every child with epilepsy is to make sure they have every opportunity that any other child without epilepsy [would have],” Lyons said. “They don’t have to feel like as if they have to be wrapped in a bubble and be treated differently. They get to go on field trips and work out in the gym with their friends or play sports.”

Local schools have done a good job working with students with epilepsy, he added.

“I think the school districts here locally have a good system in place, I think largely because we have an epilepsy program here in Winchester and Frederick County,” Lyons said.

Winchester Public Schools already has standardized treatment plans for students with medical conditions, including epilepsy, said WPS Director of Student Services Judy McKiernan. School nurses, administrators and the student’s doctors work closely to develop such plans, she added.

Having a health condition such as epilepsy can be isolating for a young student, McKiernan said.

“To know that they’re not alone and to know they’re being acknowledged that, yes, this is a challenge but that you’re supported and that our school system is going to be a supportive place,” she said. “Our state recognizing this as something we need to all be trained in I think will help them to feel part of the good that’s going on at the state.”

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