



Melissa, a tech enthusiast and an aspiring engineer from Zambia was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 16.

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At school, I experienced stigma when I tried to explain the condition to my roommates. One of them reacted so disturbed when I mentioned I have epilepsy. I was cut short because she started sharing all these myths about the condition.

I could even notice a sense of fear as she moved a bit further from me and was carrying herself in a certain way indicating that she wouldn't even want to be in close proximity to me or even touch my things after she heard that I have the condition.

I felt so hurt, embarrassed and worthless, I even regretted the idea of bringing up the topic after all.





Another incident was when we were having a make-up class and one student was misbehaving in class. Rather than just appropriately dismissing the student the teacher passed on a comment saying he should stop misbehaving like an epileptic patient during a seizure.

That comment hurt my feelings because from personal experience a seizure isn't something you can joke about but here I was in a classroom and a teacher was joking about a condition not knowing that somebody in his classroom is battling with depression knowing that they have to deal with that condition which is mistaken to be an exaggeration by society.



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In a social setting, I was trying to correct a friend of something that wasn't good but as the saying goes "the truth hurts" and it did. Well, I didn't know that I would get hurt as well. My friend's reaction towards the situation wasn't what I expected, she became so angry that she told me that she was going to beat me so hard that I fall to the ground and get in a seizure, I felt so broken because now all people could see is epilepsy and not Melissa as who she is.

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Honestly speaking whenever I feel low I would rather confide in someone living with the condition than a trained counselor or psychiatrist because I feel better understood.

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**What can we do to
reduce stigma?**

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The key is just letting people know what epilepsy is. I feel people don't know the truth about it, they have been blinded by all these myths and misconceptions that make it seem as if people with the condition are untouchable and should be isolated.

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**International
Epilepsy Day**

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In my country, the condition is mistaken to be caused by a demon. People would advise one to go to a spiritual man to be prayed for and not the hospital.

So there is a need to disseminate information about the condition in schools, hospitals, and communities so that the masses are aware of it just like they do for other pandemics.

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An example is malaria and Covid-19 pandemics. If you were to ask a 6-year-old child what Covid-19 is and how to prevent it, you will be shocked at how much information they know. In a similar way, I feel that should be the case even when it comes to epilepsy. Then we can help reduce the stigma.

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Discover more stories like *Melissa's* and
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<https://internationalepilepsyday.org>

