

## Platinum Session: Rethinking Migraine in the Workplace

### Brain Innovation Days 2023 | Panel outcomes

#### Moderator:

- **Lisa Burke**, Master of Ceremony

#### Panellists:

- **Frédéric Destrebecq**, Executive Director, European Brain Council
- **Angel Rebollo**, Founder & CEO, ARPA - EU Affairs & Communications
- **Elena Ruiz de la Torre**, Executive Director, European Migraine and Headache Alliance
- **Anja Vernelen**, Patient Advocate, Hoofd-Stuk
- **Radka Maxová**, Member of the European Parliament (Video Message)

#### Introduction

Migraine is a complex neurological disease identified as the leading cause of years lived with disability in people under the age of 50 years, the leading cause of disability in young women and the second leading cause of disability in the world. An estimated 41 million adult Europeans live with migraine of varying severity. Migraine often starts at puberty and mostly affects adults in their productive years but can also be present in children and the elderly. It is found to be the second most frequently identified cause of short-term absence for employees and among the five leading causes of emergency department visits.

Patients with migraine also have an increased incidence of co-morbid psychiatric and medical conditions, resulting in complex cases of chronic multidimensional migraine. Despite the considerable individual and societal consequences, migraine remains undiagnosed and undertreated in at least 50% of patients and less than 50% of migraine patients consult a physician. Worldwide, physicians receive only minimum education on headache disorders during their medical training.

In partnership with Pfizer, the Brain Innovation Days bring organised a session with a focus on migraine. The speakers provided insight on how we can rethink migraine in the workplace, which good practices have been put in place and what lessons can be learnt from this experience.

#### Migraine from a policy perspective

MEP Maxova emphasizes the importance of addressing migraine as a legitimate health condition and suggested raising awareness, creating inclusive workplaces, providing access to effective treatment, and encouraging open communication about the condition. She highlighted the impact of migraines on productivity, absenteeism and quality of life.

The panellists discussed the importance of companies recognizing their social responsibility and contributing to the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) plan at the European level. The focus is on the efforts to promote a "migraine-friendly workplace" within this framework. The approach involves organizing conferences with employers to explain the benefits of creating a sociologically positive and governance-oriented environment, encouraging companies to become part of this European legal situation and receive a social award.

### **Migraine from a patient perspective**

Anja Vernelen discussed the challenges faced by migraine sufferers. She emphasized the need for small changes in the workplace to improve the quality of life for individuals with headaches. Anja suggested initiatives such as flexible working arrangements, reasonable accommodations, health and safety policies, awareness campaigns, and employee assistance programs to support migraine sufferers at work.

The speakers also discussed the need for individuals with migraines to speak openly about their condition and the challenges of overcoming the fear of stigma in the workplace. The panellists also emphasize the importance of supporting the community and activating individuals to share their experiences.

### **Migraine in a workplace**

Angel Rebollo discussed the importance of workplace well-being and acknowledges the invisible nature of migraines. He shared good practices implemented by ARPA, such as providing support for staff with migraines, flexible work arrangements, and creating awareness about the condition. Robalo emphasized the need for recognition, awareness, and dedication in addressing migraine in the workplace.

The speakers highlighted the invisibility of migraines, as the condition often occurs in private, making it difficult for others to understand the severity of the symptoms. The discussion suggests that empowering workers to communicate their needs and experiences is crucial for fostering understanding and support.

Elena Ruiz de la Torre spoke about "Migraine-Friendly Workplaces". The project aims to create a supportive environment for individuals with migraines in various companies. The success of the project was noted, with over 40 large companies participating and expressing interest in promoting a more understanding and accommodating workplace for those with migraines.

### **Conclusion**

The speakers stressed the importance of dispelling misconceptions and improving knowledge about neurological disorders and mental health conditions. They emphasised the potential for new technologies and treatments to bridge gaps in understanding and contribute to improved awareness and collaboration between industry and policymakers.