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Health & Fitness

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FEATURES

LIVE WELL

'Brain Storms' conference aims to guide survivors and caregivers

By Darla Carter
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The Courier-Journal

Brain injury, stroke, epilepsy and brain tumors can drastically alter people's lives.

A conference in Louisville next week will provide guidance on managing these illnesses and becoming a better caregiver to people living with or recovering from them.

The March 6 event, "Brain Storms: Uniting Common Threads," will include presentations and panel discussions by local and national professionals,

including a Harvard professor, as well as people who've been personally affected by these conditions.

"I think this will be real helpful to the family members that are taking care of stroke survivors and (to) the actual survivors themselves," said Carrie Orman, executive director of the Kentucky and Southern Indiana Stroke Association.

Topics will include treatment options, such as medications; how to become a strong patient advocate; and emotional

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'BRAIN STORMS'

► **What:** A conference for people affected by brain injuries, epilepsy, brain tumors or stroke. This includes survivors and their families and caregivers.

► **When:** 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. March 6

► **Where:** Baptist Hospital East (Education Center, second floor)

► **Cost:** \$10 in advance; \$12 at the door. Registration forms can be downloaded at www.epilepsyfoundation.org/kentuckiana

► **More information:** Call the Brain Injury Alliance of Kentucky, (502) 493-0609, or send an e-mail to margaret.millner@blak.us

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issues, such as grief.

"Your life is never the same after you've been through" these conditions, so there are "a lot of people dealing with depression and isolation — things like that," Orman said.

The stroke association is one of four community groups that have come together for the first time to play host to the conference at Baptist Hospital East. The others are the Brain Injury Alliance of Kentucky; the Epilepsy Foundation of Kentuckiana; and the Michael Quinlan Brain Tumor Foundation, which is named after a former Courier-Journal reporter who died of brain cancer in 2001.

"We want to raise awareness about all four of these neurologic illnesses that really have a great impact here in Kentucky" and on a broad range of people, said Melinda Mast, executive director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Kentucky.

"It doesn't matter what age you are, you can be affected by these things," said Mast, who noted that falls are a major cause of brain injuries in Kentucky.

The conference, sponsored by the Norton Neuroscience Institute, will give affected individuals practical information, so they can move forward with their lives, Mast said.

"If somebody attending the conference can benefit from one of our speakers, then we've done our job," according to Debbie McGrath, executive director and co-founder of the Epilepsy Foundation of

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Speakers will include Dr. Steven Schachter, an epilepsy expert and neurology professor from Harvard Medical School, who will deliver the keynote address; and Dr. Keri Rimmel, director of the University Hospital Stroke Center.

The conference also will include people who have "been through either an actual event, such as stroke or epilepsy, or ... taken care of a family member," Orman said. "They can answer questions" and "give support to the people that are in the audience."

Kathy Quinlan-Thompson, who directs the Quinlan foundation, said the conference will be empowering for families. She was married to Michael Quinlan and said a gathering like this would have been useful during his illness.

"To have met people and to have really been able to see what all the different options were and all the different helpful organizations there were would have really helped with the stress on the journey," she said.

Reporter Darla Carter can be reached at (502) 582-7068.