



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Wednesday 14 February 2018

Family's gift aids quest to explore epilepsy link to mental health

A major fund has been established to support pioneering research into mental health and early death in people with epilepsy.

The crucial investment – named The Juliet Bergqvist Memorial Fund – is made possible by a generous gift from a family affected by suicide.

The Bergqvist family set up the fund in memory of Juliet, who was affected with epilepsy and took her own life in 2016 after battling severe depression.

More than 500,000 people in the UK have epilepsy, a brain condition that is linked to a risk of premature death. It is not clear how many of these deaths are linked to mental ill-health or could be preventable.

To address this, scientists from the University of Edinburgh are using anonymised health data to link a diagnosis of epilepsy to diagnoses for mental health conditions and causes of death.

The researchers hope to use this information to create a risk profile that identifies people who might require increased support.

Juliet Bergqvist, who was 51 when she died, was a former student of the University, having graduated with a degree in Psychology.

The Fund is launched on the feast day of St Valentine, who has been referred to as the Patron Saint of Epilepsy.

Her mother, Patricia Bergqvist, said, "Our daughter and sister, Juliet, was an epileptic who in her fifties suffered from severe depression and desperately sought help from many sources, but in the end, finding none, took her own life.

"We, as a family, are keen to assist any research that relates to depression and suicide for those with epilepsy. Some of Juliet's happiest years were her time at Edinburgh."

Dr Richard Chin, Director of the Muir Maxwell Epilepsy Centre at the University of Edinburgh, said, "We are extremely grateful for the Bergqvist family's support for this important research. The Juliet Bergqvist Memorial Fund will transform our abilities to

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research mental health and suicide and epilepsy and identify ways that we could pinpoint those most in need.”

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