



HEARING MATTERS AUSTRALIA

Support from real life experience

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Information Sheets

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Information Sheet Number 17

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR PATIENTS WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS.

(Guide for doctors, nurses, dentists, podiatrists, therapists & reception staff)

Hearing loss is an invisible handicap. It is not always easy to recognise. Some of your patients who have hearing loss will wear hearing aids, but many will not. Some will tell you they are hard of hearing; many will not. Many people with hearing loss will pretend they are hearing everything when they are not. Sometimes a member of the patient's family will draw your attention to the hearing problem, or they may just try to speak and act on the patients' behalf.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- RECOGNISE that the receptionist desk is a vital first contact- have a **Hearing Help Available** ear sign clearly displayed, and make a note of a hearing loss on the patients file as a reminder for each visit.
- ENSURE that you and your receptionist staff are aware of the difficulties faced by people with hearing loss and know how to minimise those problems as much as possible.

- GAIN THE ATTENTION of the hearing impaired person before calling them into surgery or speaking to them.
- REMEMBER that just raising your voice may not overcome communication difficulties with hearing impaired people and may result in a loss of privacy.
- DEAL DIRECTLY with your patient rather than their accompanying friends or family. Hearing impaired people have lost some of their hearing, not their individuality, dignity, self-reliance nor their intellectual competence.
- LOOK at people when you speak to them – head down, writing, trying to do several jobs at the same time, looking in drawers, hands in front of mouth, glasses or pen in mouth, speaking to hearing impaired people from a distance or behind equipment (e.g. a radiographer saying “hold your breath” from behind a screen), surgical masks or even moustaches can cause extra problems for hearing impaired people who can lip read.
- BE AWARE of those special situations – asking patients to do something as part of their examination when they cannot see you or when they have turned their hearing aid off due to equipment interference means that you have to go of your way to get their attention or to explain or demonstrate what is required of them.
- MAKE SURE the hearing impaired patient is settled and ready to listen when you explain your diagnosis and recommend treatment – write key and unfamiliar words down (legibly) to ensure that they have been properly heard and understood.
- CONSIDER the purchase of a small **amplifier and lapel microphone** (see below) for your surgery and the reception desk- these inexpensive devices are readily available and can be used easily in any situation to amplify normal speech for hearing impaired people.

COMMUNICATION DEVICES

There are several alternative portable battery-operated devices available which are suitable for use by health professionals and social workers to improve communication with a hearing impaired patient.

For a discussion on the various types of devices available, refer to sections: 3.1 & 3.2 of HMA's *Information Sheet 9: Assistive Listening Devices*.

These devices typically cost around \$300 and are available from hearing technology providers listed in the Useful Links page of the HMA website (hearingmattersaustralia.org) and also from some Audiologists. They can also be

examined and demonstrated at our HMA Information Centre.
Phone (02) 9878 6089 for times.

HMA CAN HELP BOTH YOU AND YOUR PATIENTS:

1. HMA will provide a free ***Hearing Help Available*** sticker for your office on request to indicate to your hearing impaired patients that you and your staff can communicate with them effectively.
2. Refer your hearing impaired patients, and their families and friends, to HMA if they want further information on how to manage hearing loss better. HMA is a volunteer organisation dedicated to assisting adult hearing-impaired people who still depend on the spoken word for their communication needs. No appointments are necessary to visit one of the HMA Hearing Information Centres and no fee is charged. HMA can advise on what services are available, can demonstrate assistive listening devices and can discuss communication techniques, that will be helpful.