

The maintenance and utilisation of government fitted hearing aids

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Abstract

Title: **The maintenance and utilisation of government fitted hearing aids**

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The dispensation of hearing aids in the public sector of South Africa is burdened with problems such as lack of provision of batteries for hearing aids, poor repair services and inadequate follow-up. This affects the maximum benefit derived from the hearing aid.

Hearing loss which affects communication also negatively impacts on speech and language development, cognitive development, pragmatic skills, and employment opportunities i.e. all aspects of daily living. A hearing aid is an example of an assistive listening device that attempts to minimise the consequences of hearing loss. It is a restorative mechanism that amplifies sound to compensate for hearing loss. For the greater part of the population with hearing loss it is the most cost-effective solution. Therefore, the hearing aid must be correctly fitted and used. It is vital that the client knows how the instrument operates, how to handle it, how to care for it, and, most importantly, how to use it. This involves a great deal of information giving, practice, and counselling by the speech-language pathologist and audiologist.

An effective orientation and rehabilitation programme should constitute of the following: a discussion of the types of hearing loss, the facilitation of understanding of the audiogram; information on troubleshooting and using hearing aids effectively; as well as information on the expectations of the hearing aid/s. Speech-reading techniques, coping and communication repair strategies are also important.

It is hypothesized that many individuals who are fitted with government hearing aids cannot adequately utilise and maintain their devices. Furthermore, this problem could be related to the initial hearing aid orientation and lack of follow-up rehabilitation as

this when information regarding utilisation and maintenance is usually disseminated to clients.

This study therefore aimed to examine the maintenance and utilisation of hearing aids given to clients attending provincial hospitals in Tshwane and to probe factors that impacted on the aural rehabilitation and the hearing aid fitting process, in order to contribute to the formation of service delivery guidelines.

Both a qualitative and quantitative research approach was utilised. The type of research was cross-sectional and analytical. The nature of the investigation was a descriptive survey utilising face-to-face interviews. A method of non-probability purposive sampling was employed. Fifty seven adult hearing aid users were interviewed with a structured interview schedule. Quantitative results were analysed using statistics and qualitative data was categorised into main themes and ideas.

Results showed that there was a general consensus about the self-image and wearing of hearing aids, as most participants were embarrassed to wear their devices. This could be due to inadequate and lack of counselling and public awareness. Furthermore, it was found that most government fitted hearing aids and accessories were poorly cared for and maintained. There were several factors which negatively influenced the utilisation and maintenance of hearing aids. One of these factors was finance i.e. the cost of travelling to and from hospitals, the cost of batteries as well as the cost of repairs to hearing aids played a significant role in how the hearing aid was utilised and cared for. Distance from hospitals also impacted on the maintenance as all hearing aid services were only available at tertiary institutions and not at community level. Furthermore, the issue of multilingualism presented an obstacle in terms of utilising hearing aids correctly and to their full benefit, as most participants were not instructed on hearing aid care and use in their first language.

The results from this study were utilised in the development of service delivery guidelines for the dispensation of government hearing aids.

Key words: *adults, audiology, government hospitals, hearing aids, hearing loss, service delivery guidelines, South Africa.*

Opsomming

Titel:	Die onderhoud en gebruik van gehoorapparate wat deur die regering verskaf word
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Verskeie probleme word ondervind met die verskaffing van gehoorapparate in die Suid-Afrikaanse openbare sektor, soos byvoorbeeld die verskaffing van batterye vir gehoorapparate, swak hersteldiens, en onvoldoende opvolg. Dit het 'n nadelige invloed op die maksimale benutting van die gehoorapparate.

Gehoerverlies bemoelik nie net kommunikasie nie, maar het ook 'n negatiewe uitwerking op spraak- en taalontwikkeling, kognitiewe ontwikkeling, pragmatiese vaardighede, en werksgeleenthede, dit wil sê alle aspekte van die daaglikse lewe. 'n Gehoorapparaat is een voorbeeld van 'n luisterhulpmiddel wat die gevolge van gehoerverlies kan verminder. Dit is 'n klankversterkingstoestel wat poog om vir die gehoerverlies te kompenseer. Vir die oorgrote meerderheid van die bevolking is dit die mees koste-effektiewe oplossing. Die gehoorapparaat moet egter korrek gepas en gebruik word. Dit is van kardinale belang dat die kliënt moet weet hoe die apparaat werk, hoe om dit te hanteer, hoe om dit te versorg, en, die belangrikste, hoe om dit te gebruik. Daar moet gevolglik baie inligting, oefening, en berading aan die kliënt verskaf word deur die spraak-taalterapeut en oudioloog.

'n Effektiewe oriëntasie- en rehabilitasieprogram behoort die volgende te bevat: 'n bespreking van die tipe gehoerverlies, en hulp aan die kliënt om die audiogram te verstaan; inligting oor hoe die probleem opgelos kan word en die effektiewe gebruik van gehoorapparate; asook inligting oor die gehoorapparaat

of apparate se waarborg. Spraak-leestegnieke, aanpassingstegnieke, en strategieë om kommunikasie te herstel is ook belangrik.

Daar word van die veronderstelling uitgegaan dat baie individue nie die gehoorapparate wat hulle van die regering ontvang het behoorlik kan gebruik en onderhou nie. Dié probleem kan toegeskryf word aan die aanvanklike gehoorapparaatoriëntasie en 'n gebrek aan opvolgrehabilitasie, aangesien inligting oor die gebruik en onderhoud van die apparate gewoonlik hiertydens aan kliënte deurgegee word.

Hierdie studie het dus ten doel om die onderhoud en gebruik van gehoortapparate wat verskaf word aan kliënte wat provinsiale hospitale in Tshwane besoek, te ondersoek, asook die faktore wat spraakrehabilitasie en die gehoorapparaatpassingsproses beïnvloed, ten einde by te dra tot die daarstelling van dienslewingsriglyne.

'n Kwalitatiewe sowel as kwantitatiewe benadering is vir die navorsing gebruik. Die navorsing was gebaseer op dwarsnitte en analitiese ondersoeke. Die metode van steekproefneming was onwaarskynlikheidsdoelgerig. Onderhoude is met sewe-en-vyftig volwasse gebruikers van gehoorapparate gevoer. Kwantitatiewe resultate is met behulp van beskrywende statistiek geanaliseer en kwalitatiewe gegewens is in hooftemas en -idees gekategoriseer.

Resultate het 'n algemene konsensus getoon oor selfbeeld en die dra van gehoorapparate, aangesien die meeste deelnemers verleë gevoel het om die apparate te dra. Dit kan toegeskryf word aan onvoldoende of gebrekkige berading en onkunde onder die publiek. Daar is verder gevind dat die meeste van die gehoorapparate en toebehore wat deur die regering verskaf is, swak onderhou en versorg word. Daar is verskeie faktore wat die gebruik en onderhoud van gehoorapparate negatief beïnvloed. Een van die faktore was finansiële onkoste, dit wil sê die koste daaraan verbonde om na en van die hospitale te reis, die koste van die batterye, asook die koste om gehoorapparate te herstel. Die afstande vanaf die hospitale het ook 'n groot invloed op die onderhoud van die toestelle, aangesien dienste vir gehoorapparate slegs by

tersiêre instellings beskikbaar is en nie op gemeenskapsvlak nie. Meertaligheid is 'n verdere struikelblok in terme van die korrekte gebruik van gehoortoestelle en die optimale benutting daarvan, aangesien die meeste deelnemers nie in hulle eerste taal ingelig word oor hoe om die gehoortoestelle te versorg en te gebruik nie.

Die resultate van die studie is gebruik om dienslewingsriglyne vir die verskaffing van gehoorapparate deur die regering, te ontwikkel.

Sleutelwoorde: *volwassenes, oudiologie, regeringshospitale, gehoorapparate, gehoorverlies, dienslewingsriglyne, Suid-Afrika.*

CONTENTS	PAGE NUMBER
1. CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Orientation	
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Rationale and statement of the problem	13
1.3 Organisation of the study	15
1.4 List of abbreviations	16
1.5 Definition of terms used in the study	16
1.6 Conclusion	19
1.7 Summary	19
2. CHAPTER TWO: The outcomes of hearing aid fittings in developed and developing countries	
2.1 Introduction	20
2.2 Utilisation of hearing aids in developed countries	22
2.3 Hearing aid service delivery and rehabilitation in developing countries	32
2.4 History of hearing aid services and challenges in the South African context	36
2.5 Conclusion	41
2.6 Summary	42
3. CHAPTER THREE: Methodology	
3.1 Introduction	43
3.2 Aims of the study	43
3.3 Research design	44
3.4 Ethical considerations	45
3.5 Participants	47
3.6 Materials and Apparatus	53
3.7 Pilot Study	57
3.8 Main Study	61
3.9 Data Analysis	61

3.10 Validity and reliability	62
3.11 Conclusion	63
3.12 Summary	63
4. CHAPTER FOUR: Results and discussion	
4.1 Introduction	64
4.2 Discussion of results	65
4.3 Conclusion	90
4.4 Summary	91
5. CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions	
5.1 Introduction	92
5.2 Conclusions and clinical implications	93
5.3 Critical evaluation of the study	99
5.4 Recommendations for future research	101
5.5 Conclusion	101
6. REFERENCES	103

APPENDICES

A.1: Budget Hearing Aids – 2003/2004	
A.2: Circular 24 of 2004	
B.1: Letter to Participant and Consent Form	
B.2: Letter to Medical Superintendents	
B.3: Letter to the Heads of Department (Speech Therapy and Audiology)	
C.1: Interview Schedule	
C.2: Evaluation of interview schedule	
D: Evaluation checklist	
E.1: Ethical clearance letter from University of Pretoria Research and Ethics Committee	
E.2: Ethical clearance letter from the medical superintendents of Dr. George Mukhari Hospital	
E.3: Ethical clearance letter from the medical superintendents of Kalafong Hospital	
F: Map of Tshwane	

G1: Printed photographs of hearing aids

G2: Compact Disc containing hearing aid photographs

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Outline of the founders of hearing aids companies in South Africa	8
Table 1.2: Outline and description of chapters	15
Table 2.1 Outcomes of successful hearing aid fitting	20
Table 2.2: Summary of follow-up hearing aid studies conducted in developed countries	23
Table 2.3: Intrinsic factors which may influence hearing aid fittings	25
Table 2.4: Extrinsic factors which may influence hearing aid fittings	28
Table 2.5: Summary of World Health Organization Guidelines	32
Table 3.1: Development and description of interview schedule content	56
Table 3.2: Adaptation of the interview schedule items based on results of pilot study	60
Table 4.1: Problems experienced with hearing aids	66
Table 4.2: Types of transport utilised to access hospitals and costs involved	68
Table 4.3: Replacement of ear mould tubing	73
Table 4.4: Orientation programme	75
Table 4.5: Understanding of orientation programme	77
Table 4.6: Helpfulness of pamphlet	80
Table 4.7: Three most important uses of hearing aids	85
Table 4.8: Positive and negative effects of hearing aids on participants lives	86
Table 4.9: Recommendations from participants	87
Table 4.10: Different types of hearing aids in the study	88
Table 4.11: Condition of hearing aids and ear moulds after dispensation	88

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Parts of a conventional hearing aid	6
Figure 1.2: Levels of health care in South Africa	10
Figure 1.3: Phases of hearing health care	11
Figure 3.1: Summary of the description of participants	51
Figure 4.1: Presentation of sub aims in relation to achieving the main aim	65
Figure 4.2: Action taken by participants regarding problems with hearing aids	67

Figure 4.3: Reasons for not returning to hospitals	68
Figure 4.4: Action taken by hospitals	69
Figure 4.5: Method and cost of repairs to hearing aids	69
Figure 4.6: Frequency of replacement of hearing aid batteries	70
Figure 4.7: Place and cost of acquisition of batteries	71
Figure 4.8: Frequency of ear mould cleaning	72
Figure 4.9: Method of ear mould cleaning	72
Figure 4.10: Replacement and cost of ear moulds	73
Figure 4.11: Frequency of hearing aid cleaning	74
Figure 4.12: Language of hearing aid orientation programme	76
Figure 4.13: Availability of interpreters	77
Figure 4.14: Areas covered during the hearing aid training program	78
Figure 4.15: Language of pamphlet / training manual	80
Figure 4.16: Participants ability to demonstrate hearing aid use	81
Figure 4.17: Frequency of hearing aid use	82
Figure 4.18: Situations of hearing aid use	83
Figure 4.19: Hearing ability for everyday sounds	84
Figure 4.20: Hearing aid	89
Figure 4.21: Ear mould	90
Figure 5.1: Option one of hearing aid service delivery guidelines	95
Figure 5.2: Option two of hearing aid service delivery guidelines	97
Figure 5.3: Option three of hearing aid service delivery guidelines	98