Conveying information related to the importance of early detection for hearing loss in infants is necessary to ensure parents are able to make an informed decision related to the screening of their baby. The authors agree with the comments by Joob and Wiwanitkit [1] on the critical role of the patient/health provider relationship to ensure informed choice on behalf of the parents who must consent to the screening of their newborn’s hearing. Ideally, prior to the
birth of a baby, family physicians or pediatricians should share and discuss this information with parents. In South Africa medical health care providers who see parents before the birth of their baby, such as pediatricians, have often however been found to be unsupportive of hearing screening for newborns [2]. In addition to insufficient support from health care providers the fact that hearing screening entails an out-of-pocket expense often not covered by medical insurance schemes is a further deterrent [3, 4]. It is in light of this fact, which Joob and Wiwanitkit [1] rightly point out has persisted for many years, that we have once again recommended that newborn hearing screening be included in the overall birthing package costs as opposed to an ad hoc out-of-pocket expense [5]. It is our opinion, based on contextual research findings [2, 3, 4, 5], that the combination of insufficient support from health care providers, in particular pediatricians, for newborn hearing screening along with the additional out-of-pocket costs associated with screening are main contributors to parental refusal in South Africa. Increased awareness on the importance of newborn hearing screening as de facto medical standard of neonatal care [6] along with hearing screening as part and parcel of the birthing care package will go a long way towards ensuring increased coverage. Of course those conducting the screening must also provide parents with sufficient and appropriate information, hopefully building on what has been shared by family physicians and pediatricians, so that parents can make an informed choice in the best interest of their young baby.
REFERENCES


