

Abstract EFAS/DGA 2007

Newborn hearing screening and beyond: the state-of-the-art in Europe

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Early identification of hearing impairment has become the focus of the health care systems in the vast majority of the developed countries in the world, as well as in an increasing number of developing areas.

During the past decade or so, this was made possible thanks to many concurrent factors:

- development of technology for screening, diagnosis and audiological equipment;
- development of strategies and methods for early intervention;
- position statements from influential institutions;
- legislation from national health authorities;
- advocacy from influential entities;
- benefits of early intervention from well established newborn hearing screening programs.

However, the implementation of a successful early hearing detection and intervention program, national or regional, in too many sites is still a matter of how “effective” is the initiative of a few highly concerned and motivated individuals.

A few interpretations will be provided to explain why some not-negligible areas or countries are still behind.

An issue to be raised here is the still relatively poor importance given to hearing impairment in several diverse cultures. Examples will be made to provide evidence of this aspect.

The rest of the lecture will be focused on the following issues:

- The current situation in the Western countries, with emphasis on the European area, of integrated systems of early detection and intervention of hearing loss in newborns and infants (surveillance). The situation will be discussed mainly in relation to differences and similarities among the national programs. Pros and cons between bottom-up or top-down approach will be also discussed.
- The main results of a survey on EHDI programs conducted on a representative set of countries worldwide by the International Study Group on Childhood Hearing (IGCH). This initiative parallels, and has been coordinated with, the surveys of the EHDI Team, from Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.
- How to measure effectively the outcomes of EHDI:
 - o of the program itself (technicalities)
 - o from the side of the baby (maturation and development)
- The future:
 - o Surveillance (acquired/late onset HI)
 - o UNHS and EHDI in developing areas

