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Aural rehabilitation, person centred or cost effective?

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Objective: Audiology services within the UK face the challenge of providing appropriate aural rehabilitation to an increasing population, within a restrained budget. The debate around what constitutes a 'comprehensive service' continues. Following the recent introduction of open ear fittings and telephone reviews, a new concern has emerged regarding the decrease in patient contact time as a result of these new implementations. Such developments are welcomed by managers because they enable redirection of resources to address waiting times. Many clinicians however are concerned about the effect of limited contact time on rehabilitation. What also remains unclear at present is the patients' perception of a comprehensive rehabilitation plan. This study sought to explore patients concerns about acquired hearing loss and their expectations of service provision.

Design: Seven newly diagnosed subjects were interviewed prior to their first Audiology consultation. The tape recorded interviews were open ended and lasted for one hour. The tapes were transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory approach.

Results: All subjects reported concerns regarding the psychosocial aspects of deafness. The main themes included: coming to terms with the onset of hearing loss; reactions of their family; coping with future social interactions; the ability to cope with hearing aids and the stigma attached to hearing aid use. Interestingly, all subjects reported little or no knowledge regarding the services which would be provided for them, with many expecting only to be given one hearing aid and no other intervention or support.

Conclusions: Rehabilitation services need to meet the needs of individuals, while remaining cost effective. In order to plan services effectively it is essential that clinicians are aware of concerns and expectations. This paper will discuss the implications of these results for service provision and outline areas of research which will be undertaken as a result of this study.

