

Abstract EFAS/DGA 2007

Epidemiology & Socioeconomic Impact of Hearing Loss in Europe

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There are about 82million adults (18+years) in Europe who have bilateral hearing impairment of at least 25 dB HL (averaged over 0.5, 1, 2 & 4kHz). Many of these people, maybe as many as 48million might substantially benefit from amplification through hearing aids, whilst probably only 10 – 12 million actually do benefit from hearing aids. The overall number of people with hearing problems that will substantially benefit from hearing aid will increase to about 54million in the next 8 – 10 years due to the increasingly elderly population in Europe. If proportion of those who seek help for their problems remains the same the numbers using hearing aids will increase by 1million. There are about 1.2m adults with profound deafness that is acquired later in life. However, if new technology improves take up and benefit and image is markedly improved then there will be a considerable demand for hearing services, both hearing aids and implants (cochlear, middle ear and possibly brainstem). How this demand will be met is a problem as those who are more socioeconomically able will gain better access to these services unless there is positive effort to reduce inequalities of hearing healthcare provision. It is clear that in societies with social medicine provision the cost impact of hearing impairments and provision of hearing aids could become very substantial if technological advances make hearing aids more acceptable to the hearing impaired. Recent work, in Europe and in Australia has shown that hearing impaired people are less likely to be in well paid jobs and more likely to have a lower weekly income or not to have paid employment. It is a matter for debate, discussion and empirical data (not much available!) as to whether provision of hearing services will close the gap between the hearing and hearing impaired in terms of income and socioeconomic impact.

