



Self Help for Hard of Hearing People



The official website for Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (Australia) Inc

1334 Pacific Highway, Turrumurra, NSW 2074  
Phone (02) 9144 7586 (Voice and TTY) Fax (02) 9144 3936  
Email: [shhh@netspace.net.au](mailto:shhh@netspace.net.au) Website: [www.shhhaust.org](http://www.shhhaust.org)

## Information Sheets

SHHH's Information Sheets are provided as a service to members and those in the community at large who have an interest in hearing impairment. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, SHHH accepts no responsibility for any adverse consequences arising from the contents of these sheets.

If you wish to reproduce these Information Sheets you may do so for personal use only, and only if the entire document is copied. No partial copying or editing of them is permitted. Should you have any questions about them, please contact SHHH.

© SHHH Australia Inc.

### Information Sheet Number 17

#### **COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR HEARING IMPAIRED PATIENTS**

*(Guide for doctors, nurses, dentists, podiatrists, therapists and reception staff)*

Hearing loss is an invisible handicap. It is not always easy to recognise. Some of your hearing impaired patients will wear hearing aids, but many will not. Some will tell you they are hard of hearing; many will not. Many hearing impaired people will pretend they are hearing everything when they are not. Sometimes a member of the patient's family will draw your attention to the hearing problem; sometimes they will just try to speak and act on the patient's behalf.

#### **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

- RECOGNISE that your receptionist's desk is a vital first contact – have a **Hearing Help Available** ear sign clearly displayed (as shown above), and make a note of a hearing loss on the patient's file as a reminder for each visit.

- ENSURE that you and your receptionist are aware of the difficulties faced by hearing impaired people and know how to minimise those problems as much as possible.
- GAIN THE ATTENTION of the hearing impaired person before calling them into the surgery or speaking to them.
- REMEMBER that just raising your voice may not overcome communication difficulties with hearing impaired people and may result in a loss of privacy.
- DEAL DIRECTLY with your patient rather than their accompanying friends or family. Hearing impaired people have lost some of their hearing, not their individuality, their dignity, their self reliance or their intellectual competence.
- LOOK AT people when you speak to them – head down writing, trying to do several jobs at the same time, looking in drawers, hands in front of mouth, glasses or pen in mouth, speaking to hearing impaired people from a distance or behind equipment (e.g. a radiographer saying 'hold your breath' from behind a screen), surgical masks or even moustaches can all cause extra problems for hearing impaired people who lip read.
- BE AWARE of those special situations – asking patients to do something as part of their examination when they cannot see you or when they have turned their hearing aid off because of equipment interference means that you have to go out of your way to get their attention or to explain or demonstrate what is required of them.
- MAKE SURE the hearing impaired patient is settled and ready to listen when you explain your diagnosis and recommended treatment – write key and probably unfamiliar words down (legibly!) to ensure that they have been properly heard and understood.
- CONSIDER the purchase of a small **amplifier and lapel microphone** (see below) for your surgery and the reception desk – these inexpensive devices are readily available and can be used easily in any situation to amplify normal speech for hearing impaired people.

## COMMUNICATION DEVICES

There are several alternative portable battery-operated devices available which are suitable for use by health professionals and social workers to improve communication with a hearing impaired patient.

For a discussion on the various types of devices available, refer to sections 3.1 and 3.2 of SHHH's ***Information Sheet No. 9: Assistive Listening Devices***.

These devices typically cost between \$250 and \$300 and are available from hearing technology providers listed in the Useful Links page of the SHHH website: [www.shhhaust.org/NewLinks.html](http://www.shhhaust.org/NewLinks.html), and also from some audiologists. They can also be examined and demonstrated at one of the SHHH Information Centres. Phone (02) 9144 7586 for times.

### SHHH CAN HELP BOTH YOU AND YOUR PATIENTS:

1. SHHH will provide a free ***Hearing Help Available*** sticker for your office on request to indicate to your hearing impaired patients that you and your staff can communicate with them effectively.
2. Refer your hearing impaired patients, and their families and friends, to SHHH (see above for contact details) if they want further information on how to manage a hearing loss better. SHHH is a volunteer organisation dedicated to assisting adult hearing impaired people who still depend on the spoken word for their communication needs. No appointments are necessary to visit one of the SHHH Hearing Information Centres and no fee is charged. SHHH can advise on what services are available, can demonstrate assistive listening devices and can discuss communication techniques which will be helpful.

(Revision 3)