

Clinical Tidbits

...for Physicians

September 2014

Hearing Loss Linked to Major Health Issues

Most physicians and other healthcare providers are surprised when they first learn that hearing impaired people have up to five hundred percent (500%) higher risk of dementia (including Alzheimer's). Although surprised, they quickly say it makes sense because of the reduced CNS stimulation from hearing—and the linguistic, social, and environmental stimulation it provides. They then want more information because the information they got in medical school may not have been enough, or may be outdated now. On top of that, patients don't often mention hearing issues because they think there are no viable options. Hearing tests and hearing improvement doesn't always get the attention they need, which can have adverse consequences.

Here is a quick summary about the prevalence and consequences of hearing loss:

- 20.1% of all Americans cannot pass a 25 dB hearing screening in either one or both ears using the World Health Organization (WHO) standard hearing-screening regimen.
- At age 65, 1 in 3 people have hearing loss, and over fifty percent (50%) of people over 80 have hearing loss.
- People with hearing loss have up to 500% higher risk of dementia (including ALZ). They also have increased risk of falls with broken bones, emotional isolation and clinical depression.
- Only 1 in 6 hearing impaired people purchase hearing aids, because of financial constraints and the poor reputation of hearing aids and hearing aid dealers (non-audiologists).
- There are stand-out differences between Doctors of Audiology and hearing aid dealers. National chains like Costco, Audibel, Miracle Ear and Beltone typically employ dealers with only a high school education. To dispense hearing aids, they need a one-year apprenticeship and to pass a state exam to get a license. They are not trained nor licensed to do the same procedures and diagnostics performed by audiologists. Audiologists have 8 years of academic training and clinical experience at leading medical schools.
- The principal reason digital hearing aids don't work as expected is not the fault of the hearing aids themselves, per se. It is because they were incorrectly prescribed, and do not account for the patient's ear canal acoustics and the patient's psychoacoustics. These parameters can vary widely from patient to patient and must be accounted for with advanced fitting and programming technologies, and deep clinical knowledge and experience. That is the only way to ensure the hearing aids meet the patient's exact needs, and make the aids worth the money.

References

1: Frank Lin, et.al Hearing Loss and Incident Dementia. Arch Neurol. Feb 2011; 68(2): 214–220.



2. Frank Lin, et.al. Hearing Loss Prevalence and Risk Factors among Adults in the United States. J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 2011 May; 66A(5): 582–590.

Now Hear This® Audiology and Hearing Solutions
4701 Creedmoor Road, Suite 111, Raleigh, NC 27612
Phone: 919.256.2898 Fax: 919.573.0889
www.NowHearThisClinic.com