Adult Audiology/Hearing Therapy Service for Patients with Learning Disabilities

‘Winner of the 2010 WWL Foundation Trust Award’

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Introduction

It is well documented that people with learning disabilities have an increased risk of hearing impairment. Twenty one percent of people with a learning disability will have a hearing impairment compared with 1.9% of the general population (Evanhuis et al 2001). Despite this, Adult Audiology and Hearing Therapy services for patients with learning difficulties in this country are variable, inconsistent and often unacceptable.

If a patient with significant hearing loss is denied hearing aid provision, appropriate hearing rehabilitation and hearing therapy, it is likely to result in barriers to communication and can often be detrimental to the patient’s long-term care in terms of independence, confidence, speech and language abilities etc.

There are currently around 2000 patients in this area that could benefit from intervention. However, there has never been a dedicated Audiology/Hearing Therapy Learning Disability (LD) service in this Trust.

The following information is aimed at carers and professionals who have direct or indirect contact with patients who have learning disabilities and suspect a previously undiagnosed hearing problem.

It also offers advice and guidance on what to do and who to contact if a patient is already known to our service.
Background

Pilot Study 2009

On the recognition of an unacceptable inequity of Audiology/Hearing Therapy Services for this cohort of patients compared to the rest of the population in this area, in 2009, the Audiology Department embarked on a joint one year pilot study with the Community Nurse LD Team in order to determine the need for a dedicated Adult LD Audiology/Hearing Therapy service with easy referral access. Referrers during the pilot study were the LD Nurses and Social Workers using mutually agreed referral forms.

Aims of Pilot Study

- To identify the feasibility of direct referrals into the Adult Audiology Disability service, without an initial GP or ENT referral, hence allowing rapid and simple access
- To identify appropriate referrers
- To create a formal LD re-assessment service for all new and existing hearing aid users

Outcome and Conclusions of WWL Adult Audiology Service for Patients with Learning Disabilities Pilot study 2009

The study exceeded expectations and rapidly developed into a permanent Adult LD Audiology/Hearing therapy service.

- Referral forms from the community team were found to be adequate and continue to be used
- During the pilot, all referrals from the community team satisfied the referral criteria
- Referrers found the service easy to access and welcomed a dedicated point of contact
- A hearing aid re-assessment system is now in place
- GP’s can now directly refer patients for accurate Audiological assessment and/or hearing therapy
- ENT colleagues can refer patients for an accurate Audiological assessment prior to their consultation
- If an ENT opinion is required, there is a rapid access system in place
- Existing hearing aid users and their carers find it easier to access the service by having a dedicated point of contact
Making a referral
to the Adult LD Audiology/ Hearing Therapy Service

Who is Suitable for Referral?

New Patients:

- Clients with *mild to moderate Learning Difficulties*
- Clients with *moderate to severe/profound Learning Difficulties*
  
  NB. This cohort of patients may require specialist testing equipment/ accommodation which are not currently available to the service at the present time. Please refer these patients with the understanding that the outcomes may be limited.

Existing or Past Service users:

Patients of *any level of disability* who have previously used the Audiology Services i.e. they generally have or have had hearing aid/s. The patient may have been issued with hearing aids from other services.

Before referring any patient, please check that they satisfy the direct referral criteria (appendix 1). This is available on the Audiology Department intranet web site or from the Audiology Department on request (telephone, email or fax).

Who can refer?

- ENT colleagues - to request a hearing assessment **PRIOR** to their consultation
- GP’s can refer directly to Audiology for hearing assessment/opinion
- Community LD service
- Social workers
- Other medics

How can relatives, friends and carers refer into the service?

Relatives, friends and carers of a patient who they suspect has a hearing problem or are having difficulties with their current hearing aid prescription can contact the department by telephone or email in order to discuss their concerns. They will be advised on appropriate actions to take.

How to refer?

- **Referral criteria** and **referral forms** are available on the Audiology Intranet or can be requested directly from the Audiology Department by fax, email or telephone
- Complete the form and email, post or fax to us. It is also useful if you can provide other information about the patient such as communication abilities, living arrangements, other disabilities, carers and other professionals involved with the patient
- Alternatively, send a referral letter to the Audiology Department at the Thomas Linacre Centre, Wigan
What Happens after referral?

- On receipt of an appropriate referral, the patient will receive an appointment through the post or be contacted by telephone
- The patient will have a thorough assessment and a care plan will be mutually agreed
- The patient will be referred to other agencies e.g. ENT if appropriate
- The referring agency and other professionals involved with the patient will be notified by letter, of the outcome of the appointment

How to Contact us

The LD Audiology/Hearing Therapy team are as follows:

- Heather Bamforth (Team Leader)
- Katie Ormshaw (Audiologist)
- Clare Wood (Audiologist/Hearing Therapist)
- Elizabeth Hesketh (Hearing Therapist)
- Sue Dennett (Senior Clerk)

Address     Adult LD Audiology/Hearing Therapy Service, Audiology Department, Thomas Linacre Centre, Parsons Walk, Wigan. WN1 1RU
Phone        01942 774667
Fax          01942 774639
Email        Audiology@wwl.nhs.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1
Referral Criteria for New and existing Patients into the Adult Audiology Service for patients with Learning Disabilities

Appendix 2
Referral form to Adult Audiology Service for patients with Learning Disabilities
Appendix 1

Referral criteria for **new and existing patients** into the Adult Audiology Service for Patients with Learning Disabilities

The following **referral criteria** should be satisfied before a patient with learning difficulties is referred directly to the Audiology Department for hearing assessment, hearing aid provision and/or hearing rehabilitation.

1. The patient is 19 years of age or older.
2. The patient must have been seen by the GP and have both ears de-waxed as necessary.
3. The direct referral service shall apply only to patients referred for investigation where a hearing impairment is suspected. No other type of ENT or hearing abnormality referral (e.g. tinnitus or vertigo) may be accepted.
4. Patients with existing hearing aids or have previously have been prescribed NHS hearing aids who are no longer finding them effective.
5. Existing hearing aid users that may benefit from additional assistive listening, environmental aids and Hearing Therapy.
6. The Audiologist **will not** proceed with the supply of any form of amplification without ENT consultation if any of the following conditions apply:
   - Excessive wax in either ear
   - Perforated tympanic membrane
   - An active discharge or a history of discharge from either ear in the last two years
   - Re-current otalgia affecting either ear
   - Vertigo (as classically described ‘an hallucination of movement’, not to be confused with the common unsteadiness often associated with age)
   - Hearing loss of sudden onset
   - Sudden deterioration of an existing hearing loss
   - Unilateral hearing loss
   - If the patient has undergone any ear surgery
   - Any other unusual presenting features at the discretion of the audiologist
Appendix 2

Referral form to Adult LD Audiology Service for Patients with Learning Disabilities

Date___________________________________________

Referrer________________________________________ Title____________________

Reason for referral


Patient details:

Name_________________________________________ DOB ________________________

Address____________________________________________________________________

Telephone No________________________________________ NHS No______________

GP Name_________________________________________

GP Address_______________________________________

Referral criteria: please tick

Aged 19 years or over   Symmetrical hearing loss

Exclusion criteria: please tick

No wax          No perforations

No otalgia       No Tinnitus

No vertigo       No ear operations

No ear discharge No sudden onset of hearing loss

Please give details of any other health care professional or agencies that this patient is currently under the care of (e.g. SALT, Physiotherapy, Orthoptics etc).