



Healthwatch Stockport “It’s in the Drawer” Report

Executive Summary

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Healthwatch Stockport “It’s in the Drawer” Report Executive Summary

Report from:	Healthwatch Stockport “It’s in the Drawer” Task & Finish Group
Task group:	Clem Beaumont, Tony Stokes and Joyce Drummond supported by Kirsty Bagnall.
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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Healthwatch Stockport report on the results of our “It’s in the Drawer” Task & Finish group, a project looking at local people’s experiences of wearing hearing aids.



This project is entitled “It’s in the Drawer” from a response my late Uncle Joe gave me a few years ago when I asked how he was getting on with his new digital hearing aid. Having never worn one before, he told me he had given up on wearing it and he had put in the drawer because he could not get used to it. He never did and in the drawer it stayed.

Over the years I have learned of other similar instances and understand my uncle’s problems somewhat. I have worn a hearing aid for almost 20 years and have shared some of the issues and problems encountered by the respondents completing this survey.

There are more than 10 million people in the UK with some form of hearing loss, or one in six of the population¹.

This report also builds locally on the Action on Hearing Loss Report by Laura Matthews, *Seen but not heard*², which found that a lack of clear and comprehensive information is a key issue for many participants, that participants did not feel they have sufficient time in audiology appointments to ask questions and for thorough explanations to be given, not all participants were given a follow-up appointment after their hearing aids were fitted, and the majority received no ongoing review.

¹ Hearing Matters (Action on Hearing Loss, 2013) <http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/hearing-matters.aspx>

² Seen but not Heard (Matthews, Laura) <http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/our-research-reports/research-reports-2011.aspx>



Research has shown that using hearing aids continuously will enable the brain to adapt to the device and enable users to get the most out of their hearing aid. Intermittent use of hearing aids will be less effective. In his blog post *How the brain compensates for hearing loss*³, James Robins explains, “If sound coming into the ears is distorted or degraded, the auditory nerves can adapt to make the best of the information they do have.”

However, it can take time for hearing aid users to acclimatise to the device, users are recommended to restrict use at first to reasonably easy situations and build up their use of the hearing aids as they acclimatise to the use of it.

In her book, *Principles of hearing aid audiology*⁴ Maryanne Tate Maltby explains, “Most new users need to become acclimatised to hearing aid use over a period of time... It is usually inadvisable for the aids, particularly linear hearing aids, to be worn too soon in noisy situations and is therefore not sensible for the client to wear the hearing aid in the street immediately after fitting. Wind and traffic noise are particularly disconcerting.”

Hearing loss and deafness can also lead to barriers to inclusion and feelings of isolation for both the person with hearing loss and any partners they may have. In her report, *In it together: The impact of hearing loss on personal relationships*⁵, Melissa Echaliier, reported that “Hearing loss also impacts on relationships, “There was the sense that these small communications added up to something much greater within relationships... therefore, couples experienced any hindrance to this communication as a loss and, in some cases, this led to a sense of isolation on the part of both partners.”

Following feedback from relatives, friends and the local community, we worked with representatives from Walthew House, Action on Hearing Loss, Age UK Stockport and Signpost Stockport for Carers to design a questionnaire to investigate why new hearing loss patients may give up completely wearing them.

³ How the brain compensates for hearing loss (Robins, James 2013)

<http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/how-the-brain-compensates-for-hearing-loss.aspx>

⁴ Principles of hearing aid audiology, (2nd edition) (Tate Maltby, Maryanne 2002)

⁵ In it together: The impact of hearing loss on personal relationships, RNID (Echaliier, Melissa 2010)

http://idainstitute.com/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/In%20It%20Together%20-%20Impact%20on%20Personal%20Relationships.pdf



The questionnaire was carried out during October, November and December 2013, looking for the views of local people about their experience of wearing hearing aids and the reason why some give up using them or only wear them for reduced periods of time.

Overall there has been a fantastic response to our survey; the majority of respondents were identified face-to-face in supermarkets, Stepping Hill Audiology department, Stockport Train Station and Healthwatch Stockport events in the town.

If you have any questions about any of this research, please contact us and we will endeavour to answer your queries. For a blank copy of the survey, please contact the Healthwatch Stockport office.

Finally, Healthwatch Stockport would really welcome your views about what we have found following this survey and the recommendations we have made.

Healthwatch Stockport is an independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of the public. Healthwatch plays a role at both national and local level and will make sure that the views of the public and people who use services are taken into account.

Thank you for your time in reading this report; we hope that the results will be taken into account in the planning and provision of services for people with a hearing loss.

You can get in touch with us by calling on **0161 477 8479**, email us on **info@healthwatchstockport.co.uk**, text us on **07765 568 345**, tweet us at **@HWStockport** using the hashtag **#inthedrawer**, comment on our facebook wall or write to us at **Healthwatch Stockport, Graylaw House, Chestergate, Stockport SK1 1LZ**.

Clem Beaumont

Clem Beaumont,
Healthwatch Stockport Lead on the “It’s in the Drawer” Task & Finish Group



2. Executive Summary

Below is a summary of the results received from the 223 respondents to the survey:

- The highest response, (38% of respondents) received their hearing aid 1-3 years ago
- 9 out of 10 received their hearing aid free on the NHS; fitted by NHS audiology, primarily at Stepping Hill Hospital.
- Respondents who felt they did not receive enough information were twice as likely to not wear their hearing aids at all compared to those who had received enough information.
- Only 34% of NHS patients recalled being invited to a follow-up appointment compared to all respondents who had received their hearing aids privately.
- Nearly 83% were not offered counselling or any other support when they were given their hearing aid.
- Half of respondents do not wear their hearing aids all the time they are awake with nearly 15% stating that they do not wear their hearing aids at all.
- Over half of respondents who did not wear their hearing aid, wore it for less than a month before deciding not to use it.
- 35% of respondents found making an appointment difficult when they have problems with their hearing aid, with the majority either unable to get an appointment or feeling the wait for appointments were too long.
- 68% of respondents would have found a follow-up appointment useful. The majority of comments reflected the issues highlighted in the report with explanations of why they do not wear their hearing aid and stated that given the opportunity, they would attend follow-up appointments to find solutions to these problems.
- The highest occurring reasons given for not wearing their hearing aids were:
 - 43% don't wear them because they struggle to distinguish between noises in the background and foreground
 - 41% reported that their hearing aids were uncomfortable.
 - 37% of respondents sometimes feel frustrated by their hearing aids
 - 26% reported that they do not feel the difference hearing aids make to their hearing is beneficial
 - 25% don't wear their hearing aids because they don't hear the same way they used to
 - 15% feel embarrassed to use them in public places.



This report makes recommendations to audiology departments, NHS Commissioners of the service, local GPs, Stockport Council as the Local Authority social care provider and non-statutory deaf and hard of hearing champions.

Highlights from the recommendations are as follows:

- A contact and a follow-up appointment should be offered at Stepping Hill Audiology department as well as from other NHS and private providers delivering NHS services.
- When patients have their hearing aids fitted, they should be made aware and given clear details of the monthly clinic at Shaw Heath run by Walthew House and Stockport NHS Foundation Trust.
- Audiologists should explain to patients what they can expect from hearing aids before they are fitted.
- GPs should routinely ask hearing aid users about their hearing and refer them to the audiology department if necessary.
- GPs should maintain contact with their local audiology departments to update their awareness of technology, treatment pathways and referral protocol.
- The issue of why patients stop using their hearing aids or use them for a reduced period of time is a significant one. We would recommend a “working together” approach with non-statutory care providers, in Stockport, in order to improve the quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Action on Hearing Loss in collaboration with other Deaf and Hard of Hearing Champions in Stockport, should work together to develop best practice guidelines to highlight those issues they feel have not been addressed by this report.

A full list of recommendations is available within the full report.



3. Conclusion



Many thanks to everybody who got involved in this piece of work; all partners, stakeholders, and in particular, thank you to all respondents who took the time to complete the survey. Your input will help to improve services for deaf and hard of hearing patients in Stockport.

Our research has found that half of our respondents do not wear their hearing aids all the time they are awake with nearly 15% stating that they do not wear their hearing aids at all.

The reason behind this usage varies, with key issues arising around a range of concerns. However, many of the issues that lead to patients not using their hearing aids can be easily solved via the correct support from the service provider.

Our research found that 44% of respondents who don't wear their hearing aids don't do so because they struggle to distinguish between noises in the background and foreground and over a quarter reported that they do not feel the difference hearing aids make to their hearing is beneficial and/or that they don't hear the same way they used to.

Previous research has shown that using hearing aids continuously will enable the user to acclimatise to the device and enable them to get the most out of their hearing aid (Robins, James, 2013, Tate Maltby, Maryanne 2002), a benefit not gained by those who keep their hearing aid in the proverbial drawer.

In addition, 41% reported that they reduced the use of or stopped using their hearing aids because they were uncomfortable and 37% of respondents sometimes feel frustrated by their hearing aids.

Our research has found that these issues are common amongst hearing aid users, and there are no easy solutions to solve the problems. However, there does appear to be a large difference between patient's expectations for what they anticipate their hearing aids to provide and what they actually do.

Managing the expectations of patients to ensure that they are fully informed on what their hearing aid will and will not do is imperative in ensuring that it stays out of the drawer.

As previously stated, hearing loss and deafness can lead to barriers to inclusion and feelings of isolation, particularly for older people (82% of our respondents were aged over 65). Encouraging use of hearing aids to improve the hearing of patients could lead to a reduction in the feelings of isolation brought on by loss of hearing.



With nearly 1 in 4 respondents feeling they would have liked to have been given more information when their hearing aid was given to them and nearly 83% not offered counselling or any other support when they were given their hearing aid, information is a theme running throughout our research.

68.1% of respondents stated that given the opportunity, they would attend follow-up appointments to find solutions to the problems they found with their hearing aids, an opportunity for service providers to support patients in dealing with the issues that arise from using their hearing aids. Our research suggested that patients would like to be invited to a follow-up appointment, rather than be expected to attend proactively; with some respondents feeling that they are unable to identify for themselves whether they need to attend an appointment, and instead, choose to not use their hearing aid.

For those who had attended appointments after being given their hearing aids, many responded positively to the information they had gained during these. Respondents who felt they did not receive enough information, were twice as likely to not wear their hearing aids at all compared to those who had received enough information.

It is clear from the research within this report that many of the issues that cause patients to not use their hearing aids often have very simple solutions, which can be solved by a continuous dialogue with patients from the first contact, through receiving their hearing aids to a follow-up appointment.

“If offered a [follow-up] appointment I would have gone. I now realise that automatic follow up appointments are absolutely necessary to ensure aids are used. Without such appointments the money spent supplying the aids risks being wasted.”

- Respondent, used hearing aids for one week or less



4. References

Adjusting to your hearing aids Leaflet (Action on Hearing Loss, 2013)

Hearing Matters (Action on Hearing Loss, 2013)

[\[http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/hearing-matters.aspx\]](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/hearing-matters.aspx)

How the brain compensates for hearing loss (Robins, James 2013)

[\[http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/how-the-brain-compensates-for-hearing-loss.aspx\]](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/community/blogs/our-guest-blog/how-the-brain-compensates-for-hearing-loss.aspx)

In it together: The impact of hearing loss on personal relationships, RNID (Echalier, Melissa 2010)

http://idainstitute.com/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/In%20It%20Together%20-%20Impact%20on%20Personal%20Relationships.pdf

Principles of hearing aid audiology, (2nd edition) (Tate Maltby, Maryanne 2002)

The provision of social care for people with hearing loss (Calton, Rachel 2012)

[\[http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/provision-of-social-care-for-people-with-hearing-loss.aspx\]](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/supporting-you/policy-research-and-influencing/research/provision-of-social-care-for-people-with-hearing-loss.aspx)

Healthwatch Stockport March 2014



Appendix i - About Healthwatch Stockport

Healthwatch is an independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of the public. Healthwatch will play a role at both national and local level and will make sure that the views of the public and people who use services are taken into account.

Healthwatch Stockport is a membership organisation run by volunteers with an interest in health & social care.

They are supported by a team of staff to offer help to members carrying out activity on behalf of the organisation. Healthwatch Stockport is part of a network of other local Healthwatch organisations and is supported by Healthwatch England, a national body.

Healthwatch Stockport has been given powers in legislation to help them carry out their role.

These include being able to:

- Enter & View places where publicly funded health and social care takes place;
- Promote and support local people to be involved in monitoring, commissioning and provision of local care services;
- Obtain local people's views about their needs for and experience of local care services;
- Tell agencies involved in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of care services about these views;
- Produce reports and make recommendations about how local health and care services could or should be improved;
- Have a seat on the local authority statutory Health & Wellbeing Board where they are an important contributor to the local work on reducing health inequalities;
- Help Healthwatch England carry out its role as national champion by telling it about the views and experiences of local people;
- Work with Stockport FLAG, who provide the information and advice function to signpost people to appropriate services.

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