

Audiology Newsletter

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Winter / Spring 2011

Contents:

- Emerging Companies
- Federal Budget 2011
- ThinkSmart Rentals
- Stockbrokers Foundation
- Meniere's
- Hospitals
- Apps
- Telemedicine
- HIV & Hearing Loss
- MP3 Music Players
- Closure Dates

Emerging Companies

Australian hearing aid companies are becoming increasingly competitive as the nation is seen as a jumping-off point for providing devices in south-east Asia, where hearing problems are rife.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there are 670 million people in south-east Asia who suffer from hearing impairment. The area also suffers from an extreme short-fall in audiologists, with hearing tests done by general practitioners, if at all. Demand for audiologist services in this region is high and increasing at a rate of 9 per cent a year, while demand in Europe and North America is expected to remain flat.

With only one in five people who would benefit from a hearing aid now using one, Global Industry Analysts (GIA) suggests the market for audiological devices alone is expected to reach \$22 billion by 2015 and continue to grow apace.

Local demand for hearing aids has been growing at a rate of 3-4 per cent a year, largely as a result of an ageing population, according to industry analysts IBISWorld.

Hearing aids represent 25 per cent of Australia's \$1.8 billion electronics components manufacturing exports, and Cochlear has the fastest-growing segment of the audiological devices market, with demand for its implants growing at 15 per cent a year.

There are now a number of vertically integrated European providers who provide the audiologist services and manufacture the hearing aids, moving into the Australian market.

Despite the increased competition in the local market *Bronwen Hofmeister Audiologist* is determined to continue to operate independently and take on new challenges.

Federal Budget 2011

In the May 2011 federal government budget, changes were made to the funding arrangements for young Australians with hearing impairment. Previously under the governments Community Services Obligation (CSO) scheme, once a person with hearing impairment reached the age of 21 years they were no longer eligible for government assistance for hearing aids. In recognition of the need to hear in order to attain paid employment, the government has extended the eligibility for CSO funding from 21 to 26 years of age.

ThinkSmart Rentals

Perth based financial services company ThinkSmart provides finance to consumers and small businesses renting electrical goods from companies such as JB Hi-Fi and Dick Smith. It profits from the gap between what it charges customers and its costs of funds from the likes of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, Lloyds and Westpac.

The company recently launched its Infinity product which allows customers to get financing approved online, take a printed copy of the deal into stores and walk out with the goods. This has pushed ThinkSmart to be a far more consumer-focused company of providing finance of below \$10,000 to small businesses not serviced by the big banks.

ThinkSmart has had several inquiries from audiology clinics and as such has said they are presently considering a future business model to provide financing for hearing aids and assistive listening devices.

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Stockbrokers Foundation

The Stockbrokers Foundation commenced in 1993 to encourage fundraising creativity. The Stockbrokers Foundation awards dinner last month raised just over \$300,000 bringing the total raised by the foundation since its inception to \$6.5 million. Beneficiaries have included the Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre, for which the foundation has raised \$600,000, or enough to fund 24 implant operations.

Danny Dreyfus, co-founder of the Stockbrokers Foundation, describes witnessing the switching on of a cochlear on a 12-month-old baby a few years ago: "Just watching that whole process, a kid hearing for the first time, looking to the parents for guidance—it was a really marvelous exercise to witness."

Meniere's Disease

There is no golden standard treatment for vertigo attacks that are a symptom of Meniere's disease or endolymphatic hydrops. Some reports are suggesting that a common overseas over-the-counter sea-sickness drug is having great success in reducing the severity of vertigo attacks. This drug—CINNARIZINE—trading as 'STUGERON' is NOT approved on the TGA list in Australia, however, a doctor can access it on compassionate grounds. The Macquarie Street Pharmacy in Sydney imports the drug and there is information about this drug and how to access it on the New South Wales Meniere's website

www.menieresnsw.org.au

Please note, this is NOT a personal recommendation from Bronwen Hofmeister Audiologist but rather is simply offering information to vertigo sufferers for them to discuss with their doctor.

Hospitals and Hearing Aids

In the unfortunate event a person wearing hearing aids is hospitalised, please be assertive in informing staff that you wear hearing aids. This is especially important when they need to take your temperature by placing a thermometer probe in your ear. As the hearing aid will need to be regularly removed, as well as informing staff as to the precious and dependent need for the aids, it is recommended that you have your hearing aids covered by contents insurance for loss or damage outside the home.

iPhone Apps

Starkey interactive Apps can be used for audio demonstrations, patient testimonials and detailed key product features.

You can download your free Apps onto your iPod, iPhone or iPad. Simply search "Starkey" under Apps in the iTunes Store.

One of the best Apps they offer is a *Hearing Loss Simulator* which is recommended to demonstrate to family, friends and work colleagues just what it is like to hear with various degrees of hearing impairment.

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Telemedicine

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2005 estimated 9.9% of the global population have some degree of hearing loss. Of this population, 80% live in areas where they have no access to hearing healthcare professionals. Less than 1 in 40 people receive hearing aids in developing countries (that's only a 2.5% penetration).

What is a solution? *Telehealth* or *eHealth*.

Telehealth literally means "health care at a distance". It allows for the provision of health services from one location to another using a telecommunications medium.

Tele-Audiology can provide telephone and internet hearing screening for adults, and Automatic Brainstem Response (ABR) screening for infants. Tele-Audiology also provides cochlear implant mapping for recipients in rural locations.

Tele-Audiology offers the real potential of reaching more clients, especially those in underserved areas. The opportunities are numerous and initial findings are promising. However, much research is still to be done to validate results.

HIV & Hearing Loss

As many as 75% of persons with AIDS will have auditory and ontological symptoms.

HIV is changing from a terminal illness to a chronic condition.

The global HIV prevalence in 2009 estimated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) was 33.3 million people (or 0.8% of adults).

In 2009 in Australia, 29,395 people were diagnosed with HIV (and 9% of these diagnoses were male) whilst 10,446 were diagnosed with AIDS (and 95% of these diagnoses were male).

In contrast, in 2009 in South Africa, 4.4 million adults were diagnosed with HIV and over 50% of these diagnoses were female. Tragically there were an additional 1.2 million children in South Africa diagnosed with HIV in 2009.

HIV destroys the body's immune defence mechanisms.

The most common reported auditory symptoms of HIV / AIDS are middle ear effusion and sensorineural (*permanent*) hearing loss.

The deterioration of hearing is related to the progression of HIV. High frequency hearing loss is expected to occur earlier than overall hearing loss.

With the longer life expectancy of HIV diagnoses, there is increasing emphasis on the importance of monitoring auditory function and treating auditory disorders.

MP3 Music Players

Hearing loss is becoming more common in children, US research shows. Research compared rates of hearing loss in two groups of youths aged 12 to 19. One group was tested in 1988-94 and the other group was tested in 2005-06. During the earlier time period, 14.9 per cent of young people had some form of hearing loss. In 2005-06 the figure had risen to 19.5 per cent. (*Journal of the American Medical Association. JAMA 2010; 304: 772-778 (Shargorodsky J, et al)*).

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I would like to thank all of my clients for their loyalty and support. I know I am very fortunate to have the clientele I have who are so refreshingly positive, motivated and humorous.

I welcome any feedback you have and look forward to our future endeavours.

Warmest Regards,

Bronwen

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING CLOSURE DATES:

Miscellaneous Audiology Conference (Melbourne)

Tuesday 16th August—Friday 19th August

Music & Hearing Loss Workshop (Brisbane)

Friday 2nd September

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