Counseling adults with hearing aids: Practice & Perceptions of Audiologists in South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Background
While great strides have been taken with technological advancements, client acceptance and use of hearing aids continue to be less optimal. On average it takes a person between 2-10 years to seek assistance for their hearing difficulties (English, 2008). Barriers to acceptance of hearing loss include: taking ownership, issues with self-identity, stigma, self-efficacy, unmet expectations of amplification.

The profession of Audiology, traditionally has a strong connection to the bio-medical model hence the emphasis on hearing loss and less emphasis on psycho-social aspects which relate to rehabilitation.

• However counseling is imperative to assist in the acceptance of hearing loss and adherence to treatment options (Crandell, 2000).
• Counseling is one of the ten listed clinical services offered by the audiology profession (HPCSA, 2012).

Limited data is available in this area of audiology. Results of this study was compared to a similar study by Flahive & White (1981).

Holistic management of hearing loss is imperative for successful outcomes (Endman, 2009).

Types of counseling

INFORMATIONAL COUNSELING:
Relates to answering questions regarding hearing and hearing loss, explanation of test results, anatomy of the ear, amplification use and communication strategies.

RATIONAL ACCEPTANCE COUNSELING:
Addresses emotional and psycho-social reactions to hearing loss, gaining a deeper understanding of hearing loss which leads to acceptance of hearing loss.

ADJUSTMENT COUNSELING:
Focuses on the permanency of hearing loss and concrete means to managing communication difficulties.

Context
South Africa is a middle income country – a combination of developing and developed world.

• Service provision is affected by the cultural and linguistic differences between health professionals and the population seeking health services.
• Country size: 54 million people (Stats SA,2014) 11 official languages of which English is the 5th (Swanepoel, 2006).

Educational system: 4 years undergraduate degree offered at 6 universities in South Africa. Trained mainly in English and Afrikaans.

Research question
What are audiologists’ experiences and perceptions regarding counseling adult clients who require hearing aids in South Africa?

METHOD

Aim
• To determine audiologists’ practices and views regarding counseling adult clients who require amplification.

Objectives
• To describe the nature of counseling offered by audiologists to adult clients who require hearing aids.
• To describe their views on the skills needed to counsel adult clients and the challenges faced.

Research design
• Quantitative descriptive survey.
• Self-administered semi-structured electronic questionnaire.
• 58 questions – three sections: Background information, Current Practice, Challenges.

HSS/1257/013M
Ethical clearance obtained from the Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal: HSS/1257/013M.

Participants
Recruitment: All Audiologists registered with the two professional associations and working with adult clients in South Africa were invited to participate in the study.

• Total of 152 Audiologists and Speech Therapists/Audiologists from South African Speech Language and Hearing Association (SASLHA) and the South African Association of Audiology (SAAA).
• 97% female and 3% male participants.
• 70% of audiologists were under 35 years (Age range 20-66 years).
• 90% of participants are employed in the private sector.
• 64% of participants had <10 years of working experience.

RESULTS

Nature of counseling

Informational counseling was incorporated from the beginning of contact with the client whilst rational acceptance and adjustment counseling was incorporated more equally later in the point of contact. Most time was spent on counseling the client only. 49% of the participants spent only 0-15 min counselling the client together with the significant other.

Skills and challenges of counseling

Skills and challenges of counseling

Current challenges faced by audiologists in South Africa:

Client specific (53%)
• Do not take responsibility for hearing loss
• Unrealistic expectations
• Uninformed public due to marketing restrictions of profession
• Poor socioeconomic status
• Lack of understanding
• Takes a lot of time to reach a break through with client

Audiologist specific (10%)
• Language barrier
• Lack of skills, knowledge to counsel
• Lack of clinical experience in counseling
• Time constraints for adequate aural rehabilitation
• Poor follow-up

Hearing aids specific (27%)
• Clients want cheaper hearing aids which are not the best fit
• Adherence to hearing aids, not wanting to wear hearing aids all day
• Misconceptions of hearing aids
• Cost, cosmetic appeal
• Family pressure to get hearing aids

82% of participants indicated they would like to increase their skills in counseling.

Research participants would like to increase in the skills of counseling.

CONCLUSION

Hearing loss cannot only be viewed as a loss of sense but rather a part of a whole person with other contributing factors

• Representation of younger audiologists in South Africa:
  • 65% of participants had 0-10 years of working experience.
  • 60% of participants were employed in the private sector which indicates that the majority of professionals are servicing the minority of the population (Swanepoel, 2006).
  • Counseling should be incorporated throughout the interaction with clients and not only at isolated intervals.
  • More time spent on informational counseling.
  • More time spent counseling client only rather than client together with significant other.
  • Majority spent up to 15 min counseling the client.
  • Counseling was offered mostly after audiological evaluation and after hearing aid fitting.
  • Audiologists rated their informational and adjustment counseling skills high.
  • Although still highlighted the need for further skill development.
  • More focus on counseling within the curricula of audiology training is needed.
  • Offering of courses to qualified professionals to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of counseling.
  • Need for supervision of clinical training of audiology students in order to develop skills in informational, rational acceptance and adjustment counseling.

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