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Number of People with Hearing and Balance Disorders on the Rise

Licensed Clinical Audiologists Have Expertise to Treat Adults and Children

Oshkosh, WI. (April 15, 2004) – Whether it is parents anticipating their child’s first words or a question concerning the possible hearing loss of a grandparent, our hearing is something we typically take for granted. A proper routine screening performed by your family doctor or child’s pediatrician is the first step in determining whether an individual may have a hearing loss.

Approximately 28 million Americans have a hearing impairment. Hearing loss is one of the most prevalent chronic health issues in the U.S. affecting people of all ages. Hearing loss affects about 17 in 1,000 children under the age of 18. As people age, the numbers increase with 314 in 1,000 people over the age of 65. One in three people over 60 and half of those older than 85 have some degree of hearing loss.

Hearing problems can make it difficult to understand and follow a physician’s directions, to respond to warnings, and to hear doorbells, telephones and alarms. They can also make it especially difficult to just carry on a simple conversation with family and friends. The end result can cause frustration, embarrassment and can potentially put the individual in dangerous situations.

The audiologists at Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists of Wisconsin are uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive diagnostic evaluations for all hearing and balance disorders. Audiologist Erin Petta stated, “Our audiologists have over 50 years of knowledge and expertise to assist patients in selecting the proper hearing aid.”

If screening reveals that the person may have a hearing loss, it is recommended that an appointment be made for a follow-up examination by an audiologist. An audiologist is a college educated health professional who conducts a series of tests to

determine whether the individual has a hearing problem and, if so, the type and severity of that problem.

A follow-up examination with an audiologist can help in a number of ways. Audiologists can identify the kind of hearing loss a child or adult has and very often the cause. The audiologist also may recommend further medical treatment, such as a visit to the Otolaryngologist who specializes in ear, nose and throat disorders. If a hearing problem exists, the audiologist or physician will help to determine the solution that best suits the individual's needs. Mark Conradt, Doctor of Audiology commented, "We work hand in hand with the physicians to provide the most comprehensive and cost-effective hearing healthcare for our patients. Our medical practice is not affiliated with a franchise so we can offer patients a variety of treatment options when it comes to hearing aids."

Audiologists also screen newborns for hearing loss. Infants who do not pass the hearing screening should be seen immediately. The most important period in which a child learns language is during the first six months. If you suspect that your child has a hearing loss, it is critical that you consult with an audiologist before your child reaches three months of age. Ask the hospital or pediatrician who conducted your child's initial screening for the names of licensed clinical audiologists in your area. By the time your child is six months old, he or she should be receiving some form of audiological intervention services.

There are many different types of intervention available for children. Hearing aids can be used for varying degrees of loss from mild to moderate to severe. Keep in mind it is helpful to select an audiologist who has experience with the special needs of infants and children.

The cochlear implant offers an option for the child with profound hearing loss who would not benefit from a hearing aid. It is important to consult with an Otolaryngologist who specializes in cochlear implants to decide if that is the right choice for your child.

In adults hearing loss happens for a variety of reasons. Some people lose their hearing slowly as part of the natural aging process. This condition is known as presbycusis. Physicians do not know why presbycusis happens, but research does indicate that it can be hereditary. Another reason for hearing loss may be exposure to loud noise over an extended period of time. This condition is known as noise-induced hearing loss. People affected by this type of hearing loss from prolonged exposure to loud noise include: musicians, construction workers, farmers and airport workers. Very often loud noise can cause ringing or hissing in the ears called tinnitus. In addition, hearing loss can also be caused by a virus or bacteria, heart condition or stroke, head injuries, tumors and some medicines.

People with hearing loss may experience some or all of the following problems: difficulty hearing conversations especially when there is background noise; hissing, roaring or ringing in the ears (tinnitus); difficulty hearing the TV or radio at normal volume; fatigue and irritation caused by the effort to hear; and dizziness or problems with balance. If you or a family member are experiencing any of these symptoms, make an appointment with an audiologist immediately.

There are numerous treatments and devices available for adults to help improve their hearing depending on your specific hearing problem such as hearing aids, personal listening systems, TV listening systems, direct audio input hearing systems, telephone amplifying devices, mobile phone amplifying devices, auditorium-type listening systems, cochlear implants and lip reading or speech reading.

Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists of Wisconsin hired its first licensed clinical audiologist in 1994. Presently, the practice has four staff audiologists with a combined total of 50 years of experience. The focus of the practice is on providing individualized counseling to assist patients in determining what treatment will best suit their lifestyle. In addition, the practice has three board certified head and neck surgeons who are available to consult with patients regarding their medical and surgical care needs.

“Whether providing hearing evaluations or consulting with one of our surgeons on a patient’s treatment, we specialize in treating children and adults with hearing loss. We look at the individual’s lifestyle in determining the right choice for each patient. Hearing loss patients very often need emotional support and guidance, and we make sure that our patients feel comfortable when asking questions about their treatment. The key to success is communicating with the patient and their family,” audiologist Denise Deacy stated.

It will take some time for the individual to get accustomed to using their hearing device and for friends and family to become used to speaking louder and more clearly. Feel free to ask your audiologist questions during this adjustment period and be patient. Deacy added, “There are many myths and misconceptions when it comes to hearing aids, and we give our patients the most up-to-date information to help them with the decision-making process.”

Audiologist Erin Petta stated, “Once a patient has been tested for hearing loss, we can determine whether hearing aids will help. Some of the factors we look at when choosing a hearing aid are the individual’s hearing ability, work and daily activities, physical limitations, medical conditions, cosmetic preferences and cost. We also discuss with each patient the option of wearing one or two hearing aids. Bottom line is we look at each patient on an individual basis and help them make the right choice.”

Ear, Nose and Throat Specialists of Wisconsin serves the greater Fox Cities region with six convenient office locations in Oshkosh (2), Neenah, Menasha, Ripon and Berlin. For a complete listing of services and office hours visit their Web site at www.entwis.com. To schedule an appointment with one of their audiologists, call 1-800-435-4851 or 920-303-4130.

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