

First wave update

modernising NHS hearing aid services



Welcome ...

WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE of *First Wave Update* on the project to modernise NHS hearing aid services! This newsletter will be sent to all audiology departments (as well as manufacturers and other interested parties) quarterly, to keep you informed of the project's progress.

In our first issue, we have an introduction by the Department of Health's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Sheila Adam, giving her views on this groundbreaking project. You can also find out more about the project management team, what they will be doing and how you can contact them with any comments or queries about the project. Then we have feedback from the first seminar held for participating Trusts.

In case you haven't heard where the project will be taking place, a list of First Wave NHS Trusts is included. There is also information later in the newsletter to help your department respond to the many patient enquiries that have arisen since this project hit the news.

We hope you find the newsletter informative and will look out for our second issue in the autumn when we should have lots more to tell you, including some feedback from the first few Audiology Centres introducing digital hearing aids.

What does the project mean for the NHS?

Introduction

THE PROJECT TO MODERNISE NHS hearing aid services is moving fast and much has happened since John Hutton appeared on *Watchdog* in January.

Audiology services have moved into the spotlight – as well as the project to modernise hearing aid departments, plans to pilot the introduction of universal neo-natal screening services have been announced and we expect the guidelines from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to be in the public domain.

These are important developments for all audiology departments.

Nearly half the audiology departments in England applied to be involved in the First Wave project to modernise hearing aid services. As you know we could select only twenty NHS Trusts for this phase of the programme, but we do want to keep everyone else – staff and patients and their representatives – up to date with progress.

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Both staff and patients have understandably high expectations, and we need to ensure that we have every audiology department participating in the programme in 18 months time.

So it is essential that all audiology departments become involved in plans to modernise hearing aid services – plans which will be informed by the results of the forthcoming project. To meet this aim we are taking several steps:

- issuing this quarterly newsletter to provide a regular report on progress;
- involving as many people as possible in the development of the project, through the reference group, the project management group, conferences and articles in the professional press
- taking a strategic approach to audiological services development. We must ensure that the project to modernise NHS hearing aid services dovetails with the development of NICE guidelines, the work that Dr Peter Greenaway is leading on professional development and Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening. And that together they address the themes in the National Plan for the NHS in July

This project is breaking new ground with partnership arrangements between the Department of Health, NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency, the MRC (Institute of Hearing Research) and RNID. The Department of Health has asked RNID to lead on the project management of the project and they have accepted this key role in the project. This includes responsibility for communications, and it is RNID who will be sending you this newsletter!

Sheila Adam,
*Deputy Chief Medical Officer,
Department of Health*

WHERE is the project happening?

First Wave Trusts involved in 2000/2001 are:

- Addenbrooke's NHS Trust, Cambridge
- James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust, Great Yarmouth
- Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust (Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital), London
- Forest Healthcare NHS Trust, London
- Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
- Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust, Manchester
- Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust
- East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust, Windsor
- Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust, Reading
- Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
- Queen's Medical Centre / University Hospital NHS Trust, Nottingham
- Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust
- University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust
- Royal Shrewsbury NHS Trust

Trusts involved from 2001/2002 are:

- City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
- Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
- United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
- Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, Truro
- The King's Mill Centre for Healthcare Services NHS Trust, Sutton-in-Ashfield

Project management team



DR GRAHAM SUTTON has been seconded to the project management team, on a part-time basis, from the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading. He will be working with First Wave Trusts to develop their plans for providing digital hearing aid services in

more detail over the coming months, as well as advising on equipment, training and support. He has already made initial contact with all First Wave audiology departments to discuss the proposed start date for the project in their Trust and arrangements for implementation.

PHILIPPA BALE has recently joined the project management team. She will be based full time at RNID's head office in London and will be responsible for the day to day running of the project, so participating Trusts will all meet or speak to her regularly over the next two years.



How to contact the project team

We have set up two channels to receive your comments and to deal with any queries.

Project e-mail address:

firstwave@rnid.org.uk

Project telephone number:

020 7296 8022

We will publish most frequently raised questions and comments in future editions of *First Wave Update*.



How to find out more background information on the project

Department of Health have set up a special project website, you can click on **www.doh.gov.uk/hearingaidproject** and surf the First Wave information (please excuse the pun). 

In addition, there is an interactive site for participating Trusts being developed. The password needed to access this website will be sent to our main contact in the First Wave sites.

First Wave – first get-together

THE SEMINAR ON the 26 June at St Thomas's Hospital attracted an excellent response from First Wave Trusts. Seventy delegates arrived from all parts of England, the longest journey from Truro we believe, setting off from Cornwall at 4.30am for a start time in London of 10.30am!

The day was designed to give participating NHS Trusts an opportunity to meet the project team, find out more about the project and have an opportunity to ask questions and start networking.

There were positive reactions from delegates about the seminar; they found it useful and informative, Trusts appreciated the opportunity to be more involved in the on-going development of the project and accepted that some questions still need answers!

Key issues raised by Trusts:

- *Patient criteria for inclusion in the project* – what can Trusts tell patients? Numerous requests for reassessments and referrals are anticipated.

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- **What type of digital aids are going to be introduced to the NHS?** Will there be assurances of 'future proof technology', warranties and capacity?
- **Long-term resources for the project**, in terms of funding from the Government as well as issues like staff recruitment.

Responses

- **Patient criteria** – The advice for participating Trusts is to include only patients in their existing service – because in practice, services won't be able to cope with additional patients from other areas. The project will be based on existing agreements for hearing aid services between Trusts and their service commissioners. There is an article on page 5 that may help answer general patient enquiries.
- Detailed criteria are being developed to guide First Wave departments on patients to be included in the evaluation. In general, patients who have been fitted with a hearing aid (first time or following review) through the NHS service within the last three years will not be eligible for digital hearing aids, unless they have been consistently dissatisfied or their hearing has significantly deteriorated in the meantime. However, the guidelines issued will in no way affect individual clinical discretion.
- **Digital Aids** – manufacturers are in the process of tendering to supply digital hearing aids to the NHS – the selection process should be complete by 18 August. In the meantime, assurances were given that:
 - the technical specification for manufacturers has built-in upgrades to ensure that technology is updated continuously
 - warranties are covered
 - manufacturers were required to clarify the number of aids they can produce; and this information will be taken into consideration when selecting the supplier
- will other Trusts be able to purchase digital aids from the project contract? Yes, provided they are already fitting digital aids regularly as an integral part of their hearing aid service and already have the necessary training and equipment in place. However, the priority for supply of aids will go to the First Wave Trusts. We may ask other NHS Trusts for evaluation data if they use the contract to purchase digital hearing aids. The Project office is co-ordinating the access to digital aids for non First Wave departments.
- **Resources** – At this stage, the Department of Health has committed an extra £4 million in the current year for the Project and a similar amount is expected to be allocated for the second year. The Department of Health will be looking at hearing aid services as part of the long-term government spending in the NHS.
- Staffing the modernised NHS hearing aid service needs wider discussion in the light of national recruitment problems. There should probably be greater emphasis on in-service training in the short-term.

What process will each Trust have to go through in order to 'go digital'?

The project is not just about buying the latest digital hearing aids and making them widely available through the NHS, the project is about modernising the whole hearing aid service. For the participating Trusts this will involve:

- recruiting extra staff
- working with IT departments
- developing new service protocols
- choosing equipment and resolving installation problems
- arranging training for staff in the new protocols and in fitting digital hearing aids
- reacting quickly to resolve problems

An important part of the project is the evaluation. The Government needs evidence that modernising NHS hearing aid services provides value for money and real benefits to patients. So, the First Wave Trusts will contribute to an evaluation of both their current and modernised service. This data will be collected by independent Research Audiologists based in the Trusts who will transfer outcome measures and other data to the MRC Institute of Hearing Research in Nottingham for analysis.

Questions about the new service delivery protocols are difficult to answer at this stage as they are in the process of being developed by Graham Sutton, Project Audiologist, in consultation with others. Watch this space for news.

What can we tell patients?

YOUR DEPARTMENT may have received a number of patient enquiries since the project hit the headlines. The information below is to help your department respond to these queries.

Modernising NHS hearing aid services is a Department of Health project which will evaluate:

- the costs and benefits of digital hearing aids;
- the costs and benefits of associated service delivery changes; and
- the most effective ways to provide digital hearing aids through the NHS.

The Department of Health needs the answers to these three key questions to enable changes to start to be introduced to your local hearing aid service. The project will tell us about the benefits of digital hearing aids, the best ways that they can be fitted and how NHS services can be managed to provide them effectively and efficiently.

These changes cannot be introduced everywhere, immediately, without knowing what works best, how it works and what changes need to be made. So these

innovations are being introduced to twenty NHS Trusts first. There will be fifteen NHS Trusts using digital hearing aids this year and a further five starting next year. This is about 10% of hearing aid departments.

The NHS Trusts taking part in the project will not have the capacity to see patients from outside their usual area. Many patients will be disappointed about this, especially if their local audiology service is not part of the project. But, ultimately the project will benefit everyone – it will mean that changes in hearing aid services are planned, for everyone, not introduced in a piecemeal way. It will help ensure that audiology services meet the principles of the new NHS with services provided consistently, on the basis of need, across the country.

There are a number of ways in which you can keep in touch with progress with the project. RNID has details available on its main Helpline (0808 808 0123); your audiology department will receive a quarterly newsletter and a Department of Health website on the project is being established.

Next issue of *First Wave Update*

WE HOPE TO BRING YOU news on the following in autumn's issue:

- Manufacturers and hearing aids being introduced
- Responses from the first few NHS Trusts introducing digital aids
- Details of the evaluation plan and the role of the Research Audiologist on site
- Interim findings from the Southampton project (available on RNID website in the autumn)