

Advice from Some Satisfied Consumers

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The Psi Iota Xi Needs Assessment workshop co-sponsored by the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology of the University of Iowa was held on Saturday, December 1, 1979, at the Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Center on the University of Iowa campus. Prior to the workshop, letters of invitation were sent to hearing-impaired adults; parents of hearing-impaired children; and professionals representing service agencies (such as public schools and vocational rehabilitation programs), including audiologists, teachers of hearing-impaired students, rehabilitation counselors, interpreters, and physicians.

Although more than 50 people were invited, only 20 were able to attend. This resulted in a very workable meeting, since the groups were small enough to encourage participation by everyone. The majority of the consumers in attendance were hearing-impaired adults who had received services from the University of Iowa Speech and Hearing Clinic. This preponderance of middle-aged and older adults undoubtedly influenced the direction in which discussions proceeded.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

The keynote address consisted of a brief informal statement of the purpose of the workshop and the need for input from consumers to professionals as they plan and execute rehabilitative programs for hearing-impaired individuals. Recent federal legislation affecting services to handicapped persons (P.L. 94-142, Medicare, and Medicaid acts) and regulations governing the sale of and payment for hearing aids (Federal Drug Administration, Federal Trade Commission, and Health Care Financing Administration rules) were described with regard to their possible impact on such consumer interests as the cost of hearing aids and the availability and financing of special services. Attention was called to several groups and organizations that might provide useful information to consumers and which encourage consumer input, such as the Consumer Organization for the Hearing Impaired (COHI), the HEAR Foundation, and the Iowa Conference for the Hearing Impaired.

Following the keynote address and introductions of participants, two discussion groups were formed. The discussions of Group 1 centered around diagnostic, treatment, and educational services. Group 2 addressed itself to the topics of finances and agencies involved in serving the hearing impaired. Each group spent the morning delineating problems or needs related to its general topics and the afternoon identifying possible solutions to them. The two groups met jointly at the end of the day to share highlights of their discussions.

NEEDS OF THE HEARING IMPAIRED

The predominant theme of the workshop emerged independently from the two discussion groups: the need for more public information and education concerning hearing impairment and what can be done to lessen its effects. The hearing-impaired consumers expressed a strong need to know about the services and agencies that exist both locally and nationwide. They desired more education as to the issues involved in hearing impairment in order to help clarify vague or as yet undiscovered needs of their own. Finally, more education for the general public was desired in order to alert the public to early signs of hearing loss, to sources of information and assistance, and to help the public develop a better attitude toward the hearing impaired. Specific public information needs that were identified were:

1. Physicians and nurses need to be better educated about the early signs of hearing impairment and its effects on communication and socialization.
2. Medical personnel should have better knowledge of referral agencies that specialize in services to the hearing impaired.
3. Consumers need more information and counseling regarding the etiology of hearing loss.
4. More information about newly developed devices and services for hearing-impaired persons should be readily available.
5. There should be better coordination among agencies serving hearing-impaired persons (e.g., diagnostic-medical services, educational programs, vocational rehabilitation).
6. Agencies should provide more opportunities for hearing-impaired persons and their families to meet and share common experiences, useful adaptive techniques, and mutual support.
7. More opportunities should be provided for hearing-impaired children to talk about the broad implications of hearing loss, its effect upon their futures, and their feelings about being hearing-impaired.
8. A financial support system should be developed to provide services to the elderly, including the purchasing and servicing of hearing aids.
9. Public libraries should contain more consumer information on hearing impairment.

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Consistent with the identified objective of providing more education and information, the recommended solutions stressed methods of educating both hearing-impaired consumers and the general public. Possible ways of achieving this goal were recommended by the workshop groups and appear below:

1. A concerted effort should be made by professionals to encourage more magazine and newspaper articles and television and radio features on various issues concerning hearing impairment.
2. Brochures and pamphlets on hearing impairment should be distributed through physicians' offices, churches, and community health fairs.
3. Audiologists should enlist the help of the National Advertising Council to develop quality news spots about hearing impairment.
4. The Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology and Psi Iota Xi should be encouraged to design and finance advertising and educational features in the news media.
5. Medical specialists should be educated more thoroughly about the realities of hearing impairment, both during their training programs and at professional meetings.
6. Further education of the public should be attempted through programs in area community colleges and presentations to social clubs and service organizations.
7. "Satisfied consumers" should assume responsibility for sharing their own experiences and information about services and professionals with other hearing-impaired persons.
8. There is a need for more aural rehabilitation classes and discussion groups for both children and adults sponsored by local audiologists or clinics.
9. More regional workshops of this sort should be held throughout the country in order to allow consumers and professionals from various agencies to share information and coordinate services.
10. There should be greater and earlier contact between vocational rehabilitation agencies and school-age children, their parents, and educators.
11. A central state agency should be responsible for keeping hearing-impaired persons and their families informed about services, informational programs, and special activities.
12. United Way, service clubs, and other private charitable sources should be encouraged to support financially the provision of rehabilitation services to hearing-impaired children and adults.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

An evaluation of the workshop was completed by all participants. A copy

of the form and the mean ratings given by participants appears in the Appendix. As a whole, those attending were enthusiastic about and pleased with the workshop. Many commented on the utility of having groups of consumers and professionals meet for informal discussions of needs and services. The consumers appreciated being able to express both their satisfaction with good services they have received and their opinions about needed improvement of services. The professionals, in turn, appreciated the constructive input and guidance provided by the consumers.

The group strongly recommended distribution of this workshop summary to ARA and Psi Iota Xi, to professionals and consumers invited to this workshop but unable to attend, to other professionals in the state and consumers in the area, and to the workshop participants. The intent of this distribution is to help agencies and individuals focus on the expressed needs and, through this contact, motivate them to feel more responsible for sharing in the solutions.

SUMMARY

Throughout the workshop discussions, a similar theme emerged again and again: hearing-impaired individuals do not know how to obtain audiological services, especially rehabilitative; and when they seek advice (usually from the medical community), it is often inadequate for their needs. Most of the participants had received services at the sponsoring speech and hearing clinic; many had received services in other facilities as well. Some of them reported finding these services almost by accident, and they expressed a high level of frustration about that fact. Many reported being told there was nothing that could be done to improve their communication problems. The fact that, as a group, they were highly satisfied with the help they received from audiologists made them somewhat resentful of the time wasted in obtaining it.

As an outgrowth of the discussions, the hearing-impaired participants suggested that we form an advisory council to carry out some of the solutions suggested above. Coincidentally, some of the participants are employed in public information positions and were generous about volunteering their services as advisors to the professionals concerning ways to increase public awareness of hearing impairment and its nonmedical treatment.

Our plans are to convene the advisory committee, make recommendations to the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology and Psi Iota Xi, and embark upon a concerted effort to inform the public of the availability and nature of audiological services.

It was obvious that this group of participants felt that audiologists provide excellent rehabilitative services once they are consulted. The greatest need appears to consist of *finding* services other than hearing testing, a situation we should address with vigorous effort.

APPENDIX
WORKSHOP EVALUATION SUMMARY

Workshop participants rated sixteen statements according to the following 6-point scale:

- 6 - Strongly Agree
- 5 - Agree
- 4 - Slightly Agree
- 3 - Slightly Disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly Disagree

Listed below are the rating averages for the total group, the professionals, and the consumers.

	<u>Total Group (N=21)</u>	<u>Professionals (N=11)</u>	<u>Consumers N=10)</u>
1. The workshop identified problems which I have also experienced.	5.7	5.5	5.8
2. Problems for the consumer in diagnosis and evaluation were identified.	5.3	5.2	5.5
3. Problems and needs of treatment and services were identified.	5.2	4.8	5.6
4. Financial problems and needs were identified.	4.6	4.3	4.9
5. Needs for various agencies and problems working with them were identified.	5.5	5.5	5.5
6. This workshop suggested appropriate ways to solve these problems and to meet these needs.	5.0	4.9	5.2
7. Solutions to diagnostic/evaluation problems were discussed.	5.1	4.9	5.4
8. Solutions to treatment/service needs were discussed.	5.1	4.9	5.3
9. Methods of meeting financial needs were discussed.	4.2	4.2	4.3
10. Ways of identifying agencies and obtaining their services were discussed.	5.1	5.0	5.3

	<u>Total Group (N=21)</u>	<u>Professionals (N=11)</u>	<u>Consumers (N=10)</u>
11. The participation of the consumers (hearing impaired and parents of hearing impaired) in this workshop was helpful.	5.9	6.0	5.8
12. The participation of the professionals in this workshop was helpful.	5.7	5.6	5.8
13. This workshop helped me learn new information about the problems and needs of the hearing impaired.	5.4	5.5	5.4
14. I contributed to this workshop.	5.1	5.0	5.2
15. Attending this workshop was a good use of my time.	5.7	5.7	5.7
16. Workshops like this should be offered to others involved with hearing impairment.	5.8	5.7	5.9