



Hearing and balance disorders

Achieving excellence in diagnosis and management

Hearing loss and balance disorders affect at least half of the UK's population during their lifetime, and rapid access is needed to high quality services that are uniformly available across the country. Despite recent government and third sector initiatives, little priority has been given to complex hearing disorders, balance disorders, falls clinics, care of the hearing-impaired across the transition from child to adult services, and care of the hearing and balance-impaired who are multiply handicapped.

This report, by a multidisciplinary working party, proposes a coherent networked model of care, with new working patterns. It discusses future manpower needs, both for the care of the adult and paediatric populations with hearing and balance needs, and outlines the improvement in training across all levels and disciplines of medicine and related healthcare professions, advocating the integration of training and assessment of competencies. The recommendations aim to produce an appropriately skilled workforce providing rapid access to care within the community in a cost-effective manner, basing the care on the restructured audiology and medical workforce, and ensuring that multiple referrals, inappropriate and expensive investigations and hearing and balance-related absence from work are kept to a minimum. Simultaneously, more complex cases will be directed to specialist units for appropriate diagnosis and management. The successful outcome for hearing-impaired and balance-disordered patients, with a return to full social and occupational activities, is a priority.

The report is exemplified by case studies throughout and should be read by all those interested in the education of healthcare providers, and both those commissioning and providing audiovestibular services. It provides a thorough assessment of the needs of patients, the current inadequate provision of service and the benefits of restructuring and integrating the various healthcare professionals to produce a cost-effective, efficient and patient-centred service for rapid diagnosis and management.

Report of a Working Party

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