

### Elective Report

**Describe the pattern of hearing problems within the UK and compare this to the pattern across the world:**

There are more than 10 million people with hearing loss in the UK, and one third of those are of working age. This number is rising all the time. Across the world over 275 million people have hearing impairment, and 80% of these are in low or middle income countries. A lot of primary hearing problems can be avoided through primary prevention, which is not always available in the poorer countries.

Being deaf includes an inability to interpret speech sounds and results in language delay and communication problems. This can often result in economic and educational disadvantage, social isolation and stigma. There is a strong deaf community that has grown as a result of the social isolation that they often feel, but sometimes this can isolate them further as there is less incentive to learn to lip-read and communicate with hearing people.

Deaf people in the UK have trouble getting work because of their disability and often have to live on benefits when they would rather work. This is a problem that is found across the world as well as in other high income countries such as the United States.

**Describe the healthcare and services available to the deaf community in the UK and contrast this with other countries:**

#### **Prevention:**

Half of all cases of deafness and hearing impairment is preventable by simply immunizing children and women pre pregnancy. Many diseases can result in childhood deafness such as meningitis, rubella, measles, and mumps. In most western countries, children and young girls are immunised against these diseases as standard, but many poorer countries cannot afford the vaccinations and this is one area that contributes to the rise in numbers of hearing impairment in low income countries.

#### **Early Detection:**

Screening and treating pregnant women for rubella, syphilis and other infections can help prevent and detect risk of birth deafness. The earlier it is picked up the earlier it can be treated which prevents problems with language development later on.

High risk babies include those with birth asphyxia, jaundice, meningitis and babies with a low birth weight. These babies must all be checked for any hearing problems.

In this country all babies are entitled to a hearing assessment at birth before hospital discharge. They are then supposed to be assessed again throughout the first 5 years, and at the start of school. Once again these are the areas that poorer countries cannot afford to meet the same standards so hearing impairment goes missed and untreated. As a result the children develop speech problems and have a worse prognosis for their health, as well as their future economic and social standing.

**Discuss how this elective has helped you to develop your communication skills and what you have learned about yourself:**

Before starting this elective I spent a year learning British Sign Language and achieved level 1 BSL. This helped prepare me for the elective but it wasn't until I began work at signing babies that I could see how useful it would be. I was able to communicate with babies that I would not have been able to talk to or understand before. It was amazing to see how well the children's parents understood everything their babies were saying without being able to hear them. Some of the babies were too young to be able to speak, but could already sign to their parents – suggesting that language develops a lot younger than speech. Children are able to understand and communicate before they can actually form the words, whether deaf or hearing.

I felt this taught me a lot about communication with deaf and hearing children and will help me a lot in my future in paediatrics. I will never assume that a child doesn't understand what is happening around them just because they are deaf or can't speak, or both.

**What are the main causes of deafness and briefly describe how they are managed:**

Deafness refers to the complete loss of hearing in one or both ears, whereas hearing impairment can simply be a mild loss of hearing in one ear. The two main types are conductive hearing impairment and sensorineural hearing impairment. Conductive is a problem in the middle or outer ear and is often treatable, medically or surgically. It is often temporary such as a middle ear infection. Sensorineural is usually more serious and can often be permanent. It is due to damage to the inner ear and can be sometimes improved with a hearing aid.