

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

NHS or private? Wherever you may be on your "journey" towards optimising your hearing, there are always the two options. This new series sets out to help you make an informed choice on the route that is right for you. Setting the scene for those with first time problems are **Laura Turton** on behalf of the NHS and **David Peel** for the private sector.

Take advantage of

By **Laura Turton**, Specialist Adult Audiology Team Leader, University Hospital of Coventry and Warwickshire.

In the NHS your first port of call should be to visit your doctor for an appointment where they will be able to check if your ears are clear. If you have some wax, you may be prescribed some eardrops, which will soften or help dissolve the wax, have your ears syringed or be referred for wax removal at the hospital.

Once your ears are completely clear, the doctor will make a referral to the hospital. Your doctor may discuss the different local departments with you so you can choose which clinic you would like to be seen at. This appointment should take place no more than six weeks after you have visited your doctor.

If you are over 60 years old, generally you can be referred straight to the Audiology department for a hearing assessment to see if you would benefit from a hearing aid. In this appointment, the audiologist will spend up to an hour assessing your hearing. You would normally have your ears looked into, have a hearing test, be asked about any medical history, mainly relating to your ears – and the audiologist should talk to you about the situations in which you have noticed you are starting to struggle with your hearing.

From all of this information will come a discussion with you about whether you would benefit from having a hearing aid. The team will discuss the type of hearing aid (and show you what the hearing aid will look like) and whether you would

High Street expert

By **David Peel** – Marketing Consultant to the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists.

Your first port of call in the private sector should be a Registered Hearing Aid Dispenser (RHAD) – one who's a member of the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (BSHAA) and has joined its Assured Hearing Care Scheme. Look on the Society's website, www.bshaa.com, or call them on 01371 876 623. Check your RHAD is registered by the Health Professions Council by looking on their website, www.hpc.org.uk

RHADs are trained to identify and refer conditions which might need a medical opinion. Otherwise they will discuss your hearing problems and conduct a hearing test before offering an assessment.

They will discuss whether you

need one hearing aid or two: there is much evidence that binaural fitting is most beneficial, offering more than twice the benefit of a single instrument.

They will also spend time discussing your lifestyle – identifying your interests, life and work patterns to ensure you are offered the most suitable hearing aids.

Your RHAD will want to ensure you have realistic expectations about the result of your therapy. Hearing aids can and do change the lives of millions of people each year even though a hearing aid can never fully replace the hearing that has been lost.

You will have an impression made of your outer ear to make sure the instruments fit closely and snugly and, quite quickly, often within just a few days, you will be back for an initial first fitting of the new hearing

Your NHS

like to have one or two hearing aids.

The audiologist will establish how you feel about having a hearing aid and whether it is something you want to proceed with now. If you are happy to trial the hearing aids you may have the shape of your ear taken for an earmould which needs to be sent to a manufacturer to be processed.

You will be booked back for a further appointment to have your hearing aid fitted; this has to be within 12 weeks of the hearing assessment, though many departments will see you much more quickly than this. Some people may also be referred to the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) department for a further opinion.

Those who are younger, under 60, will in the first place be referred to an ENT clinic for an assessment. The

appointment will be similar to the one with Audiology, parts of which will be conducted by a consultant rather than an audiologist.

For all ages, hearing aids are only part of the options you may be offered. The audiologist may discuss other equipment (such as amplified telephones) which may help, lip-reading classes may be offered, hints and tips on making the most of communication, or, if you have seen the ENT doctor he or she may have discussed medical or surgical options to help with your type of hearing loss.

The assessment appointment is always about providing you with information on whether you have a hearing loss or not, and, if you have, what options are available. So come along and have your hearing checked – you have nothing to lose.

s at your service

aids when they will be programmed by computer to provide the hearing correction indicated during that first hearing assessment.

The RHAD will also explain other strategies and therapies available to help you learn to use your new hearing aids and in some cases telephone and audio equipment which can be linked using Bluetooth and other wireless technologies.

You will be shown how to look after your hearing aids including battery changing and cleaning techniques.

A further appointment will be made for about a month later when you have become more used to using your new instruments, and when fine tuning can take place. This will ensure the benefits of the advanced digital technology within the instrument are used to best effect.

Your RHAD will keep in touch, and can carry out simple repairs and adjustments as needed. He or she will also suggest regular assessments to see if your actual hearing has deteriorated further – and, if it has, to make the necessary adjustments. The aim is to develop a long term relationship to ensure that you are equipped in the best possible way to enhance your hearing.

Clearly, if you choose to use a high street hearing aid dispenser you will have to pay for the service you receive. In return your RHAD will be able to offer a complete range of hearing aids, including in the ear devices, and the latest models on the market – and you will have immediate and accessible hearing care so as to receive, quickly, reassurance or advice about your condition.

So, what has been the best way forward for YOU? Send your views to the Editor, or discuss the issue on the Hearing Concern LINK website, soon to be launched in a brand new format.