

## Guidelines from NICE regarding the supply of hearing aids to people deaf in need.

“Don’t delay giving out hearing aids” GP’s ordered - *Kate Pickles, Health reporter, Daily Mail – 21.06.2018*

Doctors are being told to prescribe hearing aids at the first sign hearing loss is affecting patient’s day-to-day lives. ‘The devices should be offered at the first opportunity’ after hearing loss is detected rather than after ‘arbitrary’ thresholds, according to a health watchdog.

The new NICE guidelines followed the decision by some cash strapped health boards to stop giving aids to patients with moderate hearing loss – suggesting they lipread instead.

It has been hailed as a major victory by campaigners who say restrictions on devices – which cost as little as £90 – in some parts of the country are ‘cruel’.

Hearing loss currently affects about nine million people in England. There is strong evidence it increases loneliness and can speed up major health conditions such as dementia. It is most common in the elderly and is expected to affect 13 million people – a fifth of the population – by 2035.

The guidelines also note that the psychological, financial and health burden of hearing loss can be reduced by prompt and accurate referral, assessment and with proper management.

NICE says care currently offered to those with hearing difficulties varies widely. Many face delays in having their hearing loss identified and managed. In October 2015 North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group stopped handing out hearing aids to those with mild hearing loss and limited provision for those with moderate hearing loss.

Overall just one third of those who could benefit from hearing aids are thought to have them, with many given only one device despite needing two.

The guidelines state that they should be offered to any adult whose hearing loss affects their ability to communicate and enjoy music.

Patients with hearing loss in both ears should always be offered two devices, the document adds.

Around two-fifths – 38.4 per cent – of over fifties and almost two-thirds – 63.8 per cent – of over seventies have moderate hearing loss.

It costs the NHS £390 on average for all one person’s appointments, hearing aids and repairs for three years. Campaigners say rationing the devices is a false economy as treatments further down the line cost far more.

Paul Breckell, Chief Executive of Action on Hearing Loss, who campaigned for NICE guidelines on hearing loss said: “NICE has stated in the strongest possible terms that hearing aids – the only available treatment for the majority of those living with hearing loss – should be provided to all who need them, and that restricting provision raises serious questions of inequality of access”.

**Another point raised by the NICE guidelines** tells doctors to advise patients NOT to clean their ears with cotton buds as this can damage the ear and push wax further in. NICE instead recommends ‘ear irrigation’, which involves a machine pumping water into the ear at a controlled pressure to remove problem wax. This can be done at GP surgeries and community clinics.

Detailed report from NICE available online at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng98>