

Road to Independence Model & Protocol

Nowhere is the irony of global inequality more striking than in hearing health care, with more than 80% of people with hearing loss residing in developing countries where services are either totally absent or very limited (WHO, 2006b; Fagan & Jacobs, 2009).

Despite being the most prevalent disabling condition globally and one of the major contributors to the global burden of disease, hearing loss has historically been ignored on global health care agendas as well as in terms of social integration on an equal basis with others.

Hearing loss is referred to as the silent, overlooked epidemic of developing countries, because of its invisible nature which prevents detection through routine clinical procedures (Swanepoel, Hugo & Louw, 2005a).

The Road to Independence Model has developed a "Protocol & Guideline" regarding the functional needs of the hearing impaired adult. These guidelines must be followed when using the Protocol to insure its intended purpose.

The Protocol addresses:

1. Degree of loss
2. Clinical description
3. The functional impact on employment / social /economic, etc.
4. Recommended management in terms of hearing devices, assistive devices, human rights, access to the environment, services and products in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities.

This strategy is in line with the Social Model on Disability as well as Universal Access/Design Principles as prescribed by the current Convention as well as SA-legislation.

This protocol has been developed in collaboration with experts in the field of audiology & hearing loss, labour relations and notes the possible/likely impact of hearing loss on the person and how it may translate needed support within the workplace, as well the broader society.

It will serve as a guideline for use in the consultation process between:

1. The individual with hearing loss
2. This individual's Audiologist and ENT Specialist registered with the HPCSA
3. A representative from the disability sector (an expert on the impact of hearing loss) as prescribed in the Code of good practice & Guidelines
4. A representative of the applicable institution, employer, prospective employer, etc. of the individual with hearing loss - persons that are for example responsible for staff matters, occupational health issues, human resources etc.
5. External Occupational Health Consultant (Specialising Occupational Therapist) when necessary or in cases of dispute

This Model can only be used when ALL of the above mentioned role-players are in consultation. The point of departure is reasonability. It must be used to guide the role players to make decisions in terms of reasonable accommodation, as prescribed in the UN

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the SA Legislation & other applicable Codes & Guidelines.

This strategy in terms of the holistic approach is imperative due to variables in the prognoses outcomes in the individual's hearing loss.

As explained, the entire process is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities and the South African Legislation. It is of the utmost importance to understand and implement the following concepts in practice:

Impairment

The term impairment involves an anomaly, a defect, loss or a significant deviation in body structure or functioning. The impairment may be permanent or temporary, progressive or regressive. It can be physiological, intellectual, psychological or sensory in nature. An impairment which is associated with a cause does not imply illness or a disorder.

Disability

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) recognises disability as an evolving concept which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers. It recognizes persons with disabilities as those persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Qualified experts may be used to assist the employer to determine whether a particular impairment is substantially limiting or an applicant or employee may be able to provide information sufficient to document this.

Discrimination on the basis of “disability”

Discrimination on the basis of “disability” means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation;

Reasonable Accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

Universal design and “inclusive design”

Universal design and “inclusive design” mean the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. “Universal design” and “inclusive design” shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.

In conclusion:

There is a lack of support in terms of community based rehabilitation and social integration for deaf and hearing impaired persons. The agent of “remedy” can be the individual, the professional, and advocate or anyone who affects the arrangements between the individual and the society.

The objective of this Road to Independence strategy is to play a leading role in developing a better understanding and knowledge regarding the needs, potential and integration of all persons with hearing loss in SA.

References:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities
- The South African Constitution
- The Bill of Rights
- The Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS)
- The Employment Equity Act
- The Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities
- The Technical Assistance Guidelines on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities
- The Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act
- The National Building Regulations & Standards Act
- WHO