

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Optimum Health Services
185 Lawrie Park Gardens
Sydenham, London. SE26 6XS

18th January, 1994

Dear Sir,

I was very interested to read the paper on Characteristics of Elderly People Living in a Mental Handicap Hospital, published in the January 1993 edition of the Journal, which unfortunately has only just been brought to my notice. Our team is now subscribing to the Journal and I am sure no such "gaps" will occur in the future.

I was, however, extremely surprised to read that 88.1% of the 59 subjects examined has normal hearing. In the population without disability a third of all people over the age of 70 have a hearing loss sufficient to require the use of a hearing aid (Hickish L. G., British Medical Journal 1989, 299, 1415-1416).

In our own work between 1988-1992 500 patients with learning disability were examined and 40% were found to have a significant hearing loss, again sufficient to warrant amplification. Our sample contained people between 20-80 years of age, and all were offered a full audiological exam, including electrophysiological tests as required. This piece of research was funded by the South East Thames Region and covered the Lewisham and North Southwark districts (Yeats S. Hearing Loss in

Adults with Learning Disabilities, British Medical Journal, 1991, 303, 427-428).

I should be very interested to know what tests were carried out to obtain such a very surprising figure, as all the way through our work the figure of 39-40% has remained constant. (Measurements carried out after 100 exams, 300 exams and 500 exams.) However, in the past lower figures were obtained by earlier workers who now admit that these were inaccurate because they were not obtained by audiological exams, but often by questionnaire methods (Kropka B. I., Williams, C. The Epidemiology of Hearing Impairment in People with a Mental Handicap. In Ellis, D. ed. Sensory Impairments in Mentally Handicapped People, London, Croom Helm, 1986, 35-60).

The correct diagnosis of hearing loss in people with learning disability is of crucial importance to their quality of life and we have found that many of our older patients have been amongst the most eager to accept a hearing aid.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Sybil Yeates
Consultant in Audiological Medicine