

Hearing appointments could be enhanced when done remotely

September 10 2020, by Mike Addelman



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A survey has shown that audiologists feel the COVID-19 lockdown has brought about some beneficial changes to care of patients with hearing problems.

Dr. Gabrielle Saunders, a Senior Research Fellow at The University of Manchester says findings from the survey of 140 audiologists are a rare positive in the crisis which has caused misery across the world.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Audiology*, estimates that between 29 May and 15 June, just 5% of face to face audiology appointments took place in the UK. Many of the appointments were replaced by "telecare" or "remote care."

Most of the telecare appointments, which took place by phone, did not hinder their ability to provide audiological care using standard procedures.

Of the audiologists interviewed, nearly all of them said they would carry on working remotely into the future.

Though [hearing](#) tests cannot be carried out on the phone and ears can't be looked into, much of an [audiologist's](#) work involves advising patients.

Advice includes about how to best cope with their [hearing loss](#) and/or tinnitus, how to use hearing aids, and programming, setting up and repairing of hearing aids.

All of these activities can be carried out by remotely—by phone or video call, combined with prearranging hearing aid drop offs.

Dr. Saunders said: "Telephone calls can be very hard for patients with hearing problems, but at the moment, face to face appointments involve the audiologist wearing a mask, which is also difficult. One solution is to have a mixed appointment in which things like a hearing test and ear check are done in-person, while other activities are done via phone or video call. And it does seem from this study that remote working can improve the care of many—though not all—audiology patients. Many of the audiologists we spoke to were positive about the way of working, believing it was helpful in terms of cost and convenience for patients while not diminishing the quality of care."

She continued, "Other research actually shows patients feel it allows them to communicate more freely in their home surroundings. Programming [hearing aids](#) in patients' homes—rather than the clinic where the acoustics are often very different—means that the settings can be more personalized to the patient's needs and listening environment. Audiologists felt it was an opportunity to develop their role and improve patient care. However, more work needs to be carried out in terms of how patients see remote working, which is what we shall be doing in our next study. But in the field of audiology, I hope its use will continue to grow in the NHS as it does seem to be beneficial for patients."

More information: Gabrielle H. Saunders et al. Audiology in the time of COVID-19: practices and opinions of audiologists in the UK, *International Journal of Audiology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/14992027.2020.1814432](#)

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Hearing appointments could be enhanced when done remotely (2020, September 10) retrieved 13 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-remotely.html>

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