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## Conference Abstract

### **The hard of hearing club: A social model of hearing rehabilitation for seniors**

*Marilyn Reed MSc, Audiologist, Baycrest Geriatric Health Care System, Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

Correspondence to: **Marilyn Reed**, E-mail: [mreed@baycrest.org](mailto:mreed@baycrest.org)

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#### **Abstract**

Due to the nature of auditory aging, communication challenges in the elderly may not be adequately addressed by amplification, and require the use of additional audiologic rehabilitation (AR), including behavioural communication strategies practiced in a meaningful context. In a geriatric health care facility, our biggest challenge is to provide effective rehabilitation for seniors with severe hearing loss, who typically receive limited benefit from hearing aids. Due to the severity of their communication difficulties, they are unable to participate in groups and choose to avoid social encounters rather than deal with their challenges and frustrations. The resulting social isolation has a significant impact on their quality of life, affecting their well-being and often leading to loneliness and depression.

This presentation suggests that a different approach is required for successful rehabilitation of these clients, employing a social model where supportive communication strategies are presented in the context of meaningful social interaction. The Baycrest Hard of Hearing Club is a long-running AR group which meets weekly at Baycrest and which arose from the referral of a depressed, profoundly hard of hearing client who was socially isolated as a result of her hearing loss. She had attended AR programs and speech reading groups but had not found what she needed to address her sense of isolation. She felt that others like her would benefit from the opportunity to participate in a social club, where they could meet others with similar challenges, discuss their common problems and perhaps make friends.

Using the WHO International Classification of Functioning and Health as a conceptual framework, the Club was designed to address all of the components of the ICF model: the impairments, activity and participation restrictions, as well as personal and environmental factors that may affect communication, functional health and well-being of our patients. The social and educational components work synergistically, with socialization as a vehicle for learning and learning as a vehicle for socialization. The Hard of Hearing Club provides an opportunity for seniors isolated by their hearing loss to meet, discuss their common problems and make new friends. Its purpose is to provide a supportive, accessible environment that addresses the activity/participation needs of these patients, in keeping with the WHO ICF model, where they can function effectively as communicators, and where

their own ‘rules for communication’ are observed, so that social interactions are positive and rewarding rather than the usual frustrating negative experiences to be avoided.

The Hard of Hearing Club is in its tenth year and continues to be well-attended. Continuing referrals from psychiatry and psychology attest to the fact that the club has been helpful in addressing the psychosocial consequences of isolation brought about by hearing loss in the elderly. The original patient (now 86) for whom the group was formed reports that she now feels that she belongs to a community of friends who share the same problems and that this has had a positive impact on her emotional well-being, improved her confidence and her mood. Qualitative evaluation indicates that the group has been very successful in achieving its goal of improving quality of life for seniors isolated by severe hearing loss through increased and enhanced social participation.

## **Keywords**

**older adults, hard of hearing, behavioural communication strategies, audiologic rehabilitation, social interactions**

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Presentation available from the [FICCDAT Growing Older conference site](#)