

Better hearing just an App away

May 2 2011, By Laurie Wang

(Medical Xpress) -- People with hearing problems living in the developing world may have a solution on the horizon, thanks to an innovative University of Alberta professor in the Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine.

Bill Hodgetts, an assistant professor in the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology, has submitted an idea to a national competition, Grand Challenges Canada, for an iPhone/iPod Touch application that will test and amplify sound for the user.

“It’s something I’ve been thinking about for a while,” Hodgetts says. “The [developing world](#) doesn’t have the people to do the testing or care and I hope my application will fill that gap.”

Traditional [hearing aids](#) range in price from \$2,000 to \$7,000, but the cost of an iPod Touch or even an [iPhone](#) may be more reasonable for someone in a developing country. Already many people in developing countries own a cellular handheld device and, with close to 300 million hearing-impaired people in the world and two thirds of them residing in developing nations, Hodgetts sees an opportunity to help.

Hodgetts’ application would test the person’s hearing and then adjust the amplification of the sound accordingly. So when the [App](#) is on, people can speak to the hearing impaired person, and the sound picked up from the device’s microphone is then amplified into the earphones so the person can hear more clearly. Hodgetts also proposes that, for every application purchased in a developed nation, one person in a developing

country will receive the application for free.

“I want to develop a resource that is relatively affordable and simple—useable with only a phone and earphones—to make a huge difference in a person’s world of [hearing](#),” explains Hodgetts, who is also program director of bone conduction amplification at the Institute for Reconstructive Sciences in Medicine on the U of A campus. “And the use of cell phones and handheld devices is becoming more and more common in the developing world.”

His idea is currently posted as a video submission on the Grand Challenges Canada website where viewers can vote for a winner. Grand Challenges Canada is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of people in developing countries by integrating scientific, technological, business and social innovation both in Canada and in the developing world. The organization works with the International Development Research Centre, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and other global health foundations and organizations committed to discovering sustainable solutions to the world’s most pressing health challenges.

The video, and the votes associated with it, will be used as part of the peer review process for this grant. If successful, Hodgetts will receive a \$100,000 grant to fund the development of his idea. To view Hodgetts’ video and to vote for his idea by clicking on “Like”, visit www.grandchallenges.ca .

Provided by University of Alberta

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