

Hearing aid gap: Millions who could benefit remain untreated

February 13 2012

Though an estimated 26.7 million Americans age 50 and older have hearing loss, only about one in seven uses a hearing aid, according to a new study led by Johns Hopkins researchers.

The finding adds clarity to less rigorous estimates by device manufacturers and demonstrates how widespread undertreatment of hearing loss is in the United States, the study investigators say.

"Understanding current rates of hearing loss treatment is important, as evidence is beginning to surface that hearing loss is associated with poorer [cognitive functioning](#) and the risk of dementia," says study senior investigator, otologist and [epidemiologist](#) Frank Lin, M.D., Ph.D.

"Previous studies that have attempted to estimate hearing aid use have relied on industry marketing data or focused on specific groups that don't represent a true sample of the United States population," adds Lin, an assistant professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the university's Bloomberg School of Public Health.

To address the data gap, Lin and Wade Chien, M.D., also an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins, used data from the 1999-2006 cycles of the National Health and [Nutrition Examination Survey](#), a research program that has periodically gathered health information from thousands of Americans since 1971. During those cycles, participants answered questions about whether they used a hearing aid and had their hearing tested.

Their new findings, to be published in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#) online Feb. 13, showed that only about one in seven individuals age 50 or older – 14 percent – use hearing aids. Although hearing aid use rose with age, ranging from 4.3 percent in individuals 50 to 59 years old to 22.1 percent in those 80 and older. Overall, another 23 million could possibly benefit from using the devices, says Lin.

Lin says many with hearing loss likely avoid their use, in part, because health insurance often does not cover the costs and because people do not receive the needed rehabilitative training to learn how to integrate the devices into their daily lives. But another major reason, he says, is that people often consider hearing loss inevitable and of minor concern.

"There's still a perception among the public and many medical professionals that [hearing loss](#) is an inconsequential part of the aging process and you can't do anything about it," says Lin. "We want to turn that idea around."

Lin and his colleagues currently are leading a study to investigate the effects of hearing aids and cochlear implants on the social, memory and thinking abilities of older adults.

Provided by Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions

Citation: Hearing aid gap: Millions who could benefit remain untreated (2012, February 13) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-02-aid-gap-millions-benefit-untreated.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.