

Counselling during real ear measurements: The clients' perspective

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Objectives: The purpose of this study was to obtain the perspective of new hearing aid (HA) users regarding content and format of informational counselling during real-ear measurements (REMs).

Background: REMs are the most reliable and efficient way to verify HAs (Katz et al 2015), with multiple advantages associated with their use. Two potential sources of benefit from REMs have been proposed: (1) using REMs to match the HA response to prescriptive targets and (2) the client receiving informational counselling about their HA processing. The literature so far has focused on the first proposed benefit and thus, minimal evidence exists regarding informational counselling during REMs.

Methods: Focus groups were conducted with new HA users to elicit their feedback on possible scripts and visual formatting to be used for counselling during REMs. Seventeen adults (5 males, 12 females; 19-89 years old, with the majority being 60 or older) participated in one of four focus groups. Participants observed a live demonstration of REMs, then participated in a guided discussion for about 1.5 hours. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim, then analyzed qualitatively using the principles of content analysis.

Results: The data analysis resulted into two broad categories involving interaction (i.e., relational) and transaction (i.e., content) components of informational counselling. Participants identified specific and general aspects of the REM demonstration that they liked and did not like. They offered suggestions for improvement that were both major (e.g., a complete overhaul of the client-facing verification screen) and minor (e.g., add client-friendly labels to the existing screen) in nature.

Conclusions: Most participants were interested in learning more about REMs if the content was accessible. Their comments and suggestions have implications for audiologists counselling their clients, for manufacturers of real-ear systems, and for our understanding of ways to improve client-centred care within audiology.