

Digital hearing and beyond

CUBEX NEWSLETTER

V.A.T. Alert - Don't Delay, Save Today

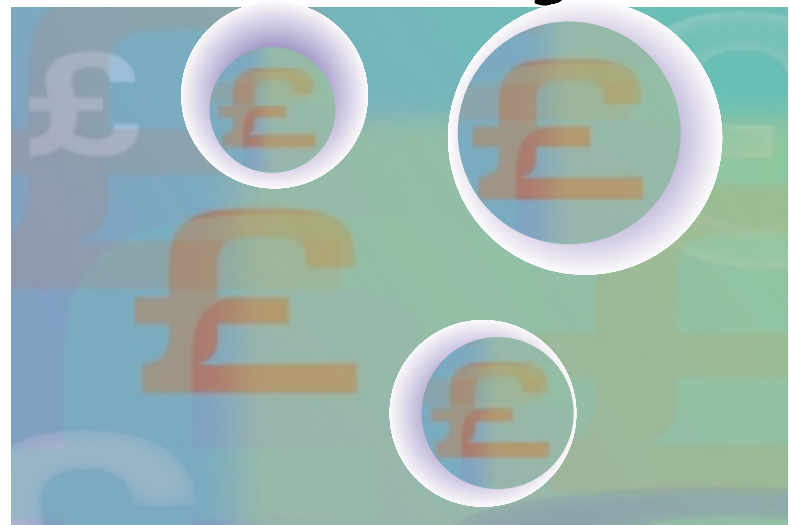


There has been much talk recently about the introduction of VAT on the supply of spectacles. The hearing aid industry is already effectively on notice that, if introduced, VAT will also be added to hearing aids.

This issue we ask Graham Bolton FCMA management accountant who has been working closely with BDO Stoy Hayward, leading accountants, for his opinion.

VAT on hearing aids has always been a contentious issue with HM Customs & Excise (HMCE). Originally, hearing aids were dispensed as a standard rated product; i.e. the retail price included 17.5% VAT. Then, in the 1990s, this was challenged and taken to the EU in Brussels where an argument for partial exemption was put forward. Partial exemption is where only part of the supply is vatable; in this case the hearing aid and the medical consultancy elements were exempt of VAT. HM Customs lost their case and a partial exemption ruling was granted. VAT treatment on the sale of hearing aids was now similar to that of spectacles.

Since that time, HMCE has looked to challenge this



argument as they have always seen the dispensing of hearing aids and spectacles as a "single supply". After a House of Lords decision in a related case, HMCE applied this ruling to Opticians as they deemed the dispensing and supply of spectacles to be a single supply. From the 1st June 2001, VAT would have been charged on the full amount. However, appeals were lodged against this ruling and the decision to implement this change has now been deferred to 1 January 2002 or earlier if decided by a test case.

This success has given Customs & Excise an opportunity to apply the same argument to the dispensing of hearing aids. However, as a result of the current appeals, this decision

has also been deferred to the 1 January 2002 but could be earlier if decided by a test case.

The general feeling is that Customs & Excise will win this appeal and as a result hearing aids will become more expensive. As mentioned, the retail cost of dispensed hearing aids currently includes an element of VAT. Should Customs & Excise win their case, which is likely, patients can expect the cost of their aids to increase 12% - 15%, depending on the type of instrument.

If you are considering a new hearing aid system we strongly urge you to consider purchasing your aids NOW - you could save yourself as much as £600.



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Cubex Mission Statement

"We are committed to providing you with outstanding service. Our staff are knowledgeable, friendly and dedicated to providing total support for all your hearing difficulties. Through the use of leading edge technology, combined with our expertise and experience, our goal is to improve your hearing."

Bravo Breaks The Barriers

In our summer issue we featured a new low cost digital hearing aid from Widex called Bravo. We also wrote to a number of local Cubex patients inviting them to attend three Open Days at our Centre and asked them to give us the opportunity to demonstrate its features.

As expected, the response to this launch was overwhelming.

Because of this we are delighted to announce that we will be holding more Bravo Open Days for any of you who were unable to attend in August.

Why Bravo?

Bravo is a low cost digital option for those who are considering upgrading their outdated analogue aids, or would simply

like to have a spare set as standby. Whilst Bravo does not offer all the benefits of higher specification digital aids, such as monitoring and adjusting automatically in background noise, it does provide good quality digital sound in various listening environments.

Although we are not making any appointments, it would be helpful if you could call us to indicate if you would prefer morning or afternoon. It will enable us to ensure that you are seen with minimum delay.

Wed 13th & Thur 14th
 November 9.30am - 8.00pm

Prices from
 £699.00

Trials without
 obligation to purchase

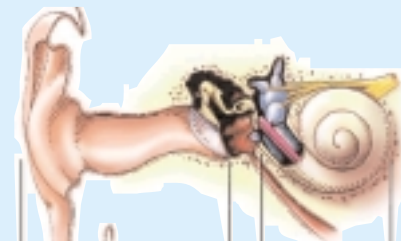
Exclusively for those who attend...
 We are offering one years supply of hearing aid batteries and two years free extended warranty on any Bravo hearing aid successfully fitted.

A Bad Hair Day or Hair Today

How can something as small as a hair cell make an enormous difference to our hearing? Most hearing problems are related to damaged or lost hair cells. These play a vital part in the transmission of sound via the cochlea (a coiled tube resembling a snail's shell) of the inner ear. Inside the cochlea are thousands of hair cells, so called because each cell appears to have tufts of hair at the tip. As the fluid around them moves, these cells convert the movement into nerve signals which are sent to the brain where sounds are 'heard'.

Sounds of varying pitch cause the fluid to move along the cochlea, which in a way is similar to a piano keyboard. There are actually two types of hair cell - approximately 3,500 inner and 25,000 outer. Simply stated, the inner hair cells

are responsible for the 'translation' (or understanding) of an incoming sound signal, whereas the outer hair cells are responsible for ensuring that the sound



is heard only at its correct pitch and not as a whole range.

Damage to either type of hair cell makes it difficult for people to detect sounds. In the case of outer hair cell damage the result is sounds are not tuned sharply, whereas loss of inner hair cell function means discrimination (or translation) of the incoming signal is permanently lost.

The result is a blurring of sounds and loss of clarity. The ability to separate sounds of different pitch is crucial for understanding speech. This is made even worse when there is other noise around.

The damage can arise from certain drugs, noise exposure (prolonged or sudden) and many other causes, but also occurs naturally with age.

Hope is on the horizon as research into preventing and even repairing some types of cellular damage is well under way. However, 'restoration' of the hearing mechanism is likely to be a long way off.

EasyTab Is Here

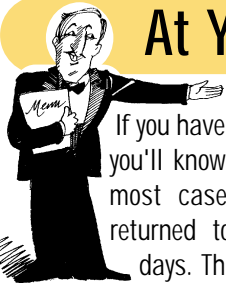
We are pleased to announce that as from 1st December 2001, Cubex will offer an ingeniously designed battery.



Aptly named 'EasyTab', it is the world's first easy to replace battery with a longer tab that makes it easier for you to see, hold and insert in even the smallest hearing aids. We believe this will eventually replace the traditional battery pack as we know it, but please let us know what you think.



At Your Service



If you have ever used our repair service you'll know just how efficient it is. In most cases your hearing aids are returned to you within five working days. This is an integral part of the unique Cubex aftercare service for which we are well known.

However, we need your help in order to maintain our impeccably high standards.

If you drop your hearing aid in to us in the morning, and it only requires cleaning, we will endeavour to have it ready for you the same afternoon.

However, if the aid is not working when you bring it in, this requires us to examine it more thoroughly. Please be prepared to leave it with us, so that the aid can be properly repaired and serviced. This may take longer.

Rest assured that your hearing aids always receive our prompt attention, however, it is not always possible to resuscitate them while you wait.

Thank you for your understanding.

Still Waiting To Hear?

Some time ago the Government proudly announced the launch of pilot schemes to introduce a range of digital hearing aids on the NHS.

The following was reported in the June/July 2001 issue of RNID's One in Seven publication and is an update of the current situation.

* **Limited availability.** The scheme is still limited to only 20 test sites nation-wide, making it difficult for many people to have access to the service. Furthermore, there is no indication of plans to extend the service throughout the NHS in the near future

* **30% increase in waiting times.** In the event that you are lucky enough to live near a participating NHS audiology department, you can expect to wait up to a year for a hearing test, in some cases even longer. The longest wait for an actual hearing aid fitting has risen by five months - from 19 to 24 months - in the last two years

* **Inequality of service.** Due to alarming discrepancies in numbers of NHS staff per head of the population using the service, receiving treatment has become a geographical lottery.

Waiting times for a hearing test range from one month to one year. There is disparity in the quality of hearing aids as some services invest more than others do. Most important of all is the amount of time designated to hearing aid fittings and patient counselling, which varies depending on how well staffed your NHS audiology department is. In one extreme case, a senior audiologist in South Wales serves about 110,000 people!

* **Inadequate funding.** All the above are symptomatic of a service under stress. Under financing means patients needs are not met. There have even been cuts in hearing aid budgets leading to money running out half way through the year and ultimately suspension in the supply of aids altogether

* **Crumbling infrastructure.** Audiology departments are often housed in cramped, inhospitable conditions with over half lacking the modern equipment needed to test and fit digital hearing aids

Without major investment and effective recruitment, waiting times will continue to grow as the standard of clinical service declines.

Music To My Ears

A recent survey published in Which? magazine revealed the following views of 1540 hearing aid users:



- All but one in eight are satisfied with their aids. Background noise and lack of speech clarity were the most common complaints
- Digital aids outnumbered analogue aids on performance and effectiveness in different listening situations. Overall 89% of digital aids users were satisfied compared to 67% of analogue users
- People who bought their aids privately were significantly more satisfied with them. 35% were very satisfied compared to 17% who obtained their aids through the NHS. Overall, 83% of private users were satisfied compared to 63% of NHS users

So, which aid is right for you?

Well, firstly this will usually depend on the type of hearing loss you have and we will need to determine this by conducting a fully comprehensive hearing assessment.

Secondly, we work with you to find the most appropriate solution to the situations in which you experience most difficulty hearing. These are established during the initial consultation.

Thirdly, once the model and style of aid has been agreed upon, it is down to our experienced consultants to fit them. Remember, a hearing aid is only as good as the way it is programmed. At Cubex, we are one of the best-equipped centres in the United Kingdom to do this.

Finally, through further visits and counselling, we monitor your progress with your new aids to ensure that you are obtaining maximum benefit from wearing them.



Handy Hints

Our tip for this issue also comes from Richard who has recently attended hearing therapy sessions and found them to be of tremendous benefit.

"When communicating, hearing impaired people know all too well how 'reading' facial expressions gives vital clues as to what is being said. You may even find yourself subconsciously reading the other person's lips. Always make sure the person you are talking to faces you and if possible have them sitting facing the window or light source."

Competition Corner ????

Well, it seems the crossword puzzle we set you in our last issue was a little too puzzling as we only received a handful of entries of which one was correct. Congratulations to our winner who wins a MiniTech television listener and our runners-up who each receive a box of batteries. The answers were: Across 1. Wave 2. Canal 3. Sensori 4. Slip 5. Situ 6. Otowizard Down 1. Faceplate 2. Ear Mould 3. Loop 4. Digital 5. CIC - Thanks to those of you who entered.

This time we will make it a little easier with an anagram. First you have to solve the following list of anagrams, then take the first letter from each word and rearrange them into the bonus word. To help get you started, all the words used are hearing related.

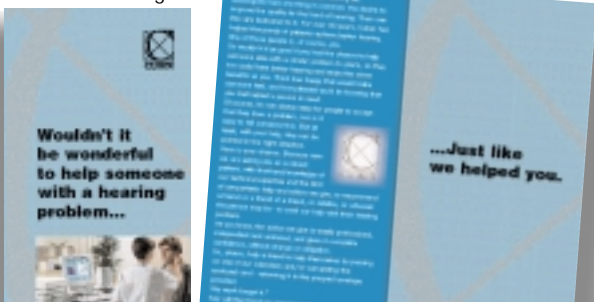
Closing date for entries is 30th November 2001. The first correct entry drawn the 3rd December will win a flight for two on the London Eye and a year's supply of batteries. Good luck!

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| 2. NINAP | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 3. USNOD | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 4. SILESOCS | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 5. NITOFEINC | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 6. LHAROCEC | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 7. MURDERA | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 8. TEASEORN | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 9. HESPCE | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 10. NICEPMOHOR | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 11. OAZRWDITO | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Bonus word: | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

RECOMMEND A FRIEND

Do you have friends who suffer from hearing difficulties, knowing that things could be better for them? You can help them experience the same benefits you have received - whether it's being recommended the right hearing aids or being given independent, unbiased and confidential advice.

In appreciation for introducing a friend, Cubex will send you a year's supply of hearing aid batteries when they are eventually fitted with a hearing aid.



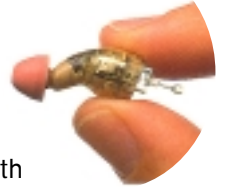
Staff Training



Please note that the office will be closing at 12.30pm on Monday 19th November for staff training. We apologise in advance for any inconvenience. This is necessary to comply with government Health & Safety procedures.

Richard Goes Undercover

In the last issue we mentioned a new disposable hearing aid coming on to the market. Called Songbird, this product is going to be distributed exclusively through Boots Hearingcare.



It is the first hearing aid to be mass-produced with a 'one size fits all' philosophy. On average, each Songbird will last just six weeks then it is simply thrown away and replaced with a new one.

As Richard is hearing impaired himself, we thought he would be an ideal candidate to go 'under cover' and find out what it's all about.

"I live in London and the closest Songbird dispensers I found were in Bromley, Kent and Chelmsford, Essex. Unfortunately, these centres could only offer appointments in six weeks to three months time.

As luck would have it, I found a Boots Hearingcare centre in my home town, Norwich, some 110 miles away from London, and they were able to see me at short notice.

I found the staff very friendly and they seemed quite professional. After completing a brief questionnaire, I was taken into an acoustically treated room. The dispenser enquired about my medical history and I was surprised at how well I was able to understand him! If only the outside world was like this, I thought to myself.

I was somewhat surprised that my first hearing test was with a tuning fork. However, it wasn't long before I was shown to a soundproof room for the usual hearing tests. The results of these satisfied the audiologist that I was an ideal candidate for Songbird, which I was very much looking forward to trying.

The moment of truth had arrived and I was eagerly waiting to hear the 'bird's song' again. I had purposely given my ears a rest and arrived 'unaided'. However, when the technician tried me with the Songbird all I could hear was the 11.49 from Paddington blowing its whistle!

Up until now the service I had received had been pretty good but I sensed that the Boots dispenser was worried as he attempted in vain to make the Songbird fit. I was reminded of the story of Cinderella!

He conceded defeat in the end, admitting that, due to the shape of my ear canal, Songbird was not a viable option. However, he added enthusiastically that a custom made in the ear aid would do the job nicely and referred me to a private hearing aid dispenser in the Norwich area, as Boots Hearingcare does not offer custom-built hearing aids.

Overall it was a pleasant enough experience but the end result was extremely disappointing. Anyone considering trying the Songbird should set their expectations low in case they experience similar fitting problems. Furthermore, it is not as cost-effective as it appears with one year's supply costing in excess of £250.00 per ear.

Thank goodness my family was there to cheer me up and I had remembered to bring along my Cubex hearing aids!" RA