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Welcome to the Christmas Edition of the HCIA newsletter, which brings you the latest hearing care information and up-to-date events for the coming months.

HCIA – The Year In Focus

It has been a tremendously busy year for the Board and staff of HCIA. We have had many dealings with the office of the Federal Minister of Ageing, the Hon. Justine Elliot MP, on a range of issues, and have met quite regularly with the Office of Hearing Services (OHS). We have also established contact with most of the other bodies involved in the hearing care industry and believe that – in the long run – these relationships will benefit practitioners around the country.

The input provided by all of you in the Member Practitioner Survey was extremely valuable and was presented by HCIA to Minister Elliot and to the OHS. The information gleaned from that survey allowed us to give the Minister and the Department some very real and practical insights into the proposed new Clinical Pathways and Rehabilitation Plus proposals.

Clinical Pathways

HCIA was successful in having the proposed new Clinical Pathway placed under review. Importantly, we were supported by extensive feedback from across the hearing services industry – all of whom agreed that the proposed pathway was seriously flawed.

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The OHS has advised HCIA that it is now developing alternate approaches to the proposed Clinical Pathway “to balance stakeholder concerns with achieving safety and quality outcomes for clients.”

HCIA understands that a new draft of the Clinical Pathway is currently with the Minister’s office and that a new round of consultation will take place, most likely in the New Year. HCIA has asked the Minister’s office to ensure our Members have enough time to respond to the next draft.

Rehabilitation Plus

Whilst we were not successful in having this program put on hold, we were responsible for having it reviewed.

HCIA argued that the research to date – in relation to the effectiveness or otherwise of Rehab Plus – was not conclusive. HCIA does not believe the research is clear on whether clients should attend one, two, five, or ten sessions, nor whether group or individual sessions are most effective.

The OHS has now commenced a benchmarking project to evaluate the effects of Rehab Plus on the satisfaction and outcomes achieved for newly fitted clients. The results will be compared to those clients who have not received Rehab Plus as part of their fitting and rehabilitation program.

The project started in November 2008 and will be completed in 18 months.

Approximately 1000 clients will be surveyed using a self completed questionnaire. The questionnaire will look at various factors including client motivation, hearing aid use and benefit, residual activity limitations, participation restrictions, satisfaction, impact of hearing loss on others, quality of life, disability, and bilateral aid use.

HCIA will report the results of this research once they are completed.

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In the meantime, we would urge you to continue to give us feedback about your experience with the Rehabilitation program.

You can be assured that HCIA has not lost sight of the fact that the remuneration being offered for providing Rehab Plus is not adequate and we will continue to argue the case that our Members need to be properly remunerated.

Australian Hearing

HCIA welcomed the appointment of the new CEO of Australian Hearing, Steven Grundy. Whilst Australian Hearing is not a Member of HCIA, Steven has indicated that he is keen to see the industry work together on matters of common interest.

Return Vouchers

HCIA is not happy with the new return voucher process now in place. We continue to work with the Minister's office and the OHS to see if the current system can be remedied to the satisfaction of our Members.

Deed of Standing Offer Review

The OHS has indicated that there are a number of changes proposed under the Deed which relate to device specifications, coverage and duration of warranty, return-for-credit processes, device scheduling, and listing processes.

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Whilst HCIA fundamentally supports better technology for clients, HCIA does not support any further changes to the Deed at this point in time.

The level of technology currently available on the free-to-client list is better than other like programs throughout the world in terms of the level of technology supplied free to clients and in terms of value for dollar for the Australian Government. One only needs to look at other sophisticated markets in Europe and the Americas to see that free to client devices in Australia far exceed minimum specifications set in other countries.

HCIA maintains that the program currently achieves favourable outcomes for clients. It is our strong view that market-induced forces have resulted in considerable advances in technology and device features set in the free-to-client product category over the past three years. Indeed, this will continue to occur as product development in our industry is globally driven and not based on the Australian OHS scheme device standards. There is no need, therefore, for any intervention by the OHS in relation to setting a minimum standard for device specifications additional to the current standard. New products with new technology will continue to populate the OHS device lists as manufacturers have product “end of life” policies in place to avoid inventory write off and out of date technology linked to their brand.

We are concerned that the Service Provider notice issued by the OHS in relation to proposed changes to the Deed is misleading in that it does not put in context for the Service Providers the flow on effects of the intended changes. For example, how can a provider be practically expected to advise on length of warranty when there is no current understanding of whether the OHS is considering this question in light of fees paid for batteries and maintenance?

HCIA will work with HAMADAA, ACAud, and ASA to ensure that the OHS receives comprehensive and appropriate feedback in relation to the proposed changes.

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The Statement of Attainment in Audiometry

The Statement of Attainment in Audiometry (SoAA) will be open for enrolment through the Open Training Education Network (OTEN) from 5 January 2009.

OHS has advised that the SoAA is a requirement for audiometrists working under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. The OHS will pay course fees for all eligible practitioners and training will cover:

- Developing and implementing an individual hearing program;
- Applying hearing device technology;
- Dispensing and maintaining hearing devices for adults and providing communication counselling; and
- Identifying needs for referral.

The SoAA will be delivered through distance learning and a four-day residential session. Subsequent to feedback received from the industry, the OHS has worked with ACAud, HAASA, and HCIA to make available opportunities to attend residential sessions in Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, as well as Sydney.

HCIA was pleased that the OHS were open to offering the course in other States, but remains concerned about such matters as:

- Whether the course is actually compulsory; and
- Whether there is duplication in the subjects being offered.

HCIA is aware that HAASA and ACAud are not entirely comfortable with what is being proposed and we are hopeful that, together, we can get some clarity on this issue early in the New Year.

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HCIA Welcomes A New Member

HCIA's Membership now consists of the following companies:

- National Hearing Care
- Connect Hearing
- HearingLife Australia
- AudioClinic
- The Neurosensory Unit
- Widex Australia

HCIA is very happy to welcome its newest member – Bay Audio – represented by the General Manager, Andrew Campbell.

www.bayaudio.com.au

Bay Audio is a hearing health care organisation based in South East Queensland with a focus on innovation. One of Bay Audio's main objectives is to play a part in the process of de-stigmatising or normalising the common issue of hearing loss. The company has been operating in Australia for less than two years and currently occupies South East Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Bay Audio's parent company is Bay Audiology, the largest audiology retailer in New Zealand, having recently acquired clinics in Hong Kong and Singapore. Bay Audio supports HCIA's efforts in giving the industry a voice in what has historically been a one way conversation in Australia.

If you have an article of news you would like to submit for inclusion in our next newsletter, please email your article to mail@hcia.com.au.

In the meantime, the Board and staff of HCIA wish you a very happy and safe festive season.

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The logo for the Hearing Care Industry Association (HCIA) features the letters 'HCIA' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. To the left of the 'H', there is a stylized graphic element consisting of four vertical bars of varying heights, resembling a hearing aid or a sound wave.