A Resonating Need: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Clinicians Bring Beneficial Attributes to Healthcare

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Background

Although they make up nearly 20 percent of the world's population, with 5 percent experiencing disabling hearing loss, Deaf and hard of hearing (D/HOH) people make up an estimated 0.4 percent of physicians. Surprisingly, there was no data regarding the D/HOH within other healthcare professions, suggesting that very few D/HOH nurses, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, etc., exist. **Major stereotypes and negative connotations about the D/HOH person's ability to succeed in the healthcare setting have led to very limited representation.** Limited research has been done on the potential for D/HOH to have positive impacts on the healthcare industry. This study examined existing data and research to explore the unique qualities that these individuals may be able to bring to the patient experience.

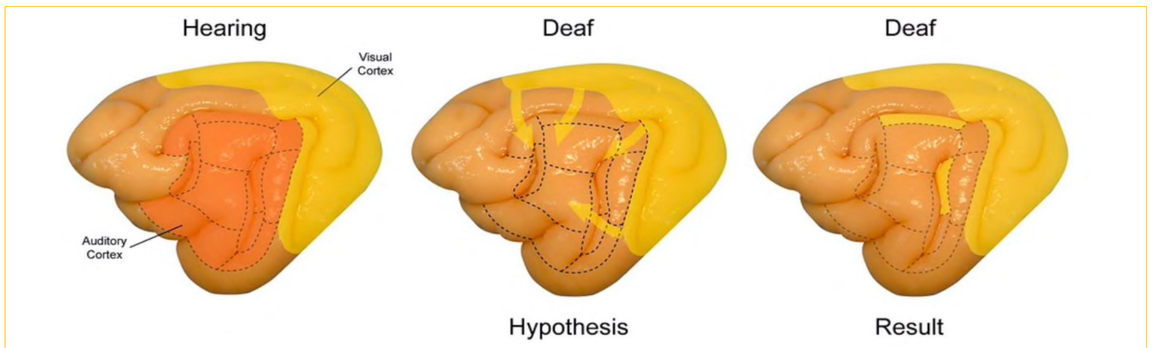
1 out of every 5 people live with hearing loss

WHO, 2023



Findings

Limited studies identified associated with D/HOH healthcare clinicians, regardless of practicing environment (I.E., hospital verses clinic setting). However, **multiple studies suggest that the D/HOH population may utilize alternative thinking methods in problem-solving situations**. It has been shown that the D/HOH brain utilizes neuroplastic processes to compensate for sensory loss; this can result in compensatory visual acuity and processing. In addition, D/HOH healthcare personnel **may be better able to relate to D/HOH patients** because of similar life experiences and communication styles. Communication advantages and differential thinking styles (when applied to the healthcare setting) were identified as key themes associated with the practice of D/HOH clinicians.



In Deaf cats, the brain's visual cells migrate to the hearing region, as seen in set of diagrams. Image borrowed from Vulcan Coalition, 2022.

Methods

A literature review was conducted focusing on D/HOH healthcare clinicians actively working in the healthcare environment. Search terms were entered into Medline, Biological Science Collection, and Science Direct College Edition without date or geographic restrictions. Keywords used were "deaf healthcare workers, deaf nurses, hard of hearing nurses, problem-solving skills in the deaf, deaf and HOH healthcare benefits, benefits of deaf providers, and deaf/HOH in the hospital setting".

Main Objective

To understand qualities unique to the D/HOH communities that may contribute positively to the patient care experience.

Conclusion

There are certain attributes that D/HOH clinicians may bring to the healthcare environment that have the potential to improve the patient's experience. **They may help close the knowledge gap when it comes to understanding D/HOH patients, in addition to providing valuable perspectives and unique critical thinking skills.** The researcher recognized a definitive need for additional research to evaluate perceptions from both D/HOH clinicians as well as those patients cared for by those with hearing impairment in the healthcare environment.