



Difficulties accessing community dewaxing services

The Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) has just published a [report on the current state of community dewaxing services](#), highlighting the difficulties that many people have in accessing this service¹. Their recent survey suggests that 66% of people seeking dewaxing have been told that the NHS no longer provides this service, with many having to resort to using private services. More than a quarter of participants could not, however, afford private dewaxing services and many resort to ineffective and, in some cases, dangerous means of trying to clear the wax themselves.

This situation is not infrequently reiterated by the patients we see in our clinics and is a source of considerable discomfort, causing hearing loss, earache, exacerbation of tinnitus as well as difficulties for hearing aid users. Unfortunately, primary care is not remunerated for dewaxing services and the number of practices offering this type of service has dwindled. This is despite NICE recommendations, in their document NG98, stating that individuals with ear wax should be offered dewaxing by the NHS in the community².

In addition, and in reaction to the lack of services provided by the NHS, there has been a proliferation of private sector dewaxing services in the community. While some provide good service, these are unregulated with no mandatory requirements for either the training of those delivering the care or standards as to how the care is delivered.

This is clearly not an acceptable situation and there has been significant pressure from a number of organisations for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to address this. The RNID and the British Association of Audiologists (BAA) raised their concerns to the All Party Parliamentary Group in September, with promises to discuss this further. A number of very useful documents have also been published to provide guidance on self care^{1,3} and provide standards of care. For example, the British Society of Audiology (BSA) have set out clear practice guidance related to aural care⁴, have provided guidance on minimum training standards for aural care practitioners⁵ and have set out how those providing training courses can become accredited⁶.

The British Society of Otolology (BSO) has also developed a clear clinical pathway to help primary care practitioners appropriately manage those patients presenting with probable wax obstruction (to be published shortly on the BSO website) and are encouraging Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to re-introduce better quality community dewaxing services.

There are, however, still considerable hurdles to overcome. There has been very little engagement from the DHSC in our discussions on the subject. We have approached the Care Quality Commission (CQC) about improving the regulation of dewaxing services, but they do not see this as their role as dewaxing services are not subject to regulation by the DHSC. We have also approached the ENT Getting Right First Time (GIRFT) team but, although they are supportive of optimising hospital dewaxing services, community services are not part of their remit.

The BSO and other stakeholders will continue to push for improvements in the delivery of community dewaxing services and there is a building momentum from us, from our patients and from the press⁷ that we hope will improve the quality of dewaxing services across the UK.

References

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