The development of an online resource on hearing loss and its management

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Introduction & Background

Hearing loss has a huge, unseen impact on communication, whether in childhood or in adulthood. Today’s technology can transform this, but often it is not readily available. Although the internet has been a growing source of health information (e.g. Hesse et al., 2005), the information provided on hearing loss is often disseminated across a wide range of domains (Thornton et al., 2005), making access challenging to those who need it; both specialists and non-specialists. Furthermore, the quality, readability, and usability of internet information seems to be highly variable (e.g. Lapiante-Luqueque et al., 2015; Lapiante-Luqueque & Thorton, 2015). In particular, studies involving hearing loss have shown that the accessibility to the information is limited, and the information that is provided can be difficult to access (e.g. Pieter & Lapage, 2007; Zuidam Zut & Janssens, 2004). Moreover, there seems to be a need for interactive services such as feedback mechanisms and communities (Gossin & Elhadam, 2013). This is where SoundSpace Online comes in, to bring together the wide range of good quality information and practical resources available on hearing loss, on the impact it has on the lives of deaf children, young people and adults, and on its management (Ng, Archbold, Mayer & Mulla, 2015).

Method

How is this website being developed?

The structure and content of the website is being developed, continuously reviewed and monitored by a group including experts in e-learning, education, hearing loss, and research. Members of the target groups were asked to discuss their needs and expectations, and after several reviews and iterations the current structure was reached. The sections are being developed by experts including audiologists, teachers, speech and language therapists, medical practitioners and researchers, who are specialized in the field of hearing loss. The information will be controlled using measures of quality, readability and usability (see accessibility). To encourage patient and public involvement (PP1), user and professional groups are being asked to review the website.

Results & Discussion

Who will be able to use this website?

• Those with hearing loss, their families and friends, and caregivers;
• Those working with people who may have a hearing loss and their families, including audiologists, teachers, speech and language therapists, researchers, otologists, ENT specialists, social workers for the deaf, psychologists, classroom assistants;
• Non-specialists, including policy makers, administrators and funders of services;
• Any other person who may be interested to learn more about hearing loss;
• SoundSpace Online is open to a national and international audience.

How is this website structured?

The homepage includes information on the content, those who will be able to use the website, user access and those who supported the website. It also includes links to the eight sections that address a topic on hearing loss (right part of top figure). The structure of the website involves eight sections (Level 1) which has four subsections (Level 2), which in turn has three to six subsections (Level 3). These subsections lead to one more set of subsections (Level 4), which next to information also includes relevant links to a sectional resource page with references and tools (see bottom figure for example of levelling).

How can this website be accessed and used?

Access will be free to all for the first levels of each of the eight sections of the website, and additionally to all levels of the first section on ‘Impact of Hearing Loss’. Access to Levels 3 and 4 (membership at a reasonable rate. The purpose of this fee is to provide the resources to ensure website and content sustainability, and will be kept as low as possible to provide equity of access.

The website is designed for flexible and functional use of multi-disciplinary information and resources on hearing loss including overviews and recent developments, implications of hearing loss in daily life for those of all ages, and current hearing technologies and their management. In addition, visitors of the website can ask questions, make comments or suggestions at any point in time, with feedback to help and guide them.

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www.earfoundation.org.uk