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19 September 2014

Dear Dr Shapley,

An open letter from the Audiology community to North Staffordshire CCG

We are writing to condemn North Staffordshire CCG's proposals to decommission hearing aids for people with mild to moderate adult-onset hearing loss. As professionals working to meet the needs of people with hearing loss we are deeply concerned to hear of these proposals, which will leave thousands of local residents unable to communicate in their day to day lives.

Hearing loss is estimated to affect 10 million people in the UK, but most hearing loss is permanent, and cannot be surgically or medically treated. The best way of reducing the impact of hearing loss is to wear hearing aids. Hearing aids allow people with hearing loss to stay in work, have full social lives, stay connected to loved ones and manage other health conditions. We see every day how people with mild to moderate hearing loss have difficulty following conversations without hearing aids, and how the early diagnosis and management of hearing loss provides more benefit and makes it much easier for the individual than waiting until their hearing loss is more severe.

Furthermore, there is clear and comprehensive evidence of the clinical benefits of providing hearing aids for people with mild to moderate hearing loss, from randomised controlled trials and Health Technology Assessments. Studies have shown that hearing aids improve communication, relationships, self-confidence, social participation and overall health, and that they reduce depression and anxiety.

Since it was established in 1948, the NHS has always provided free hearing aids to all those who need them. We implore you to reconsider these proposals, and work with Audiologists and patient groups to provide high quality services to all those who need them.

Yours sincerely,

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