



QUALITY STANDARDS

FOR

MIDDLE EAR IMPLANTATION

Revision 1

HEARRING Group

2013





This clinic is a member of the HEARRING network.

HEARRING is a **learning network of collaborative experts** in the field of hearing implants. It is an association of preeminent international centers offering comprehensive hearing implant solutions for the treatment of hearing loss.

HEARRING members are committed to leading the exploration of new avenues of research in hearing implant science, to advancing clinical procedures and to developing and perfecting surgical techniques. Membership in the HEARRING network is founded on the belief that research, and any subsequent advancement in the field of hearing implants, is possible only through **international collaboration** and the pooling of collective experience from leading clinical centers around the world.

In order to provide each patient with the best possible hearing implant solution for the treatment of her/his individual hearing loss, the HEARRING network is committed to the **highest standards of quality**.

HEARRING surgeons are worldwide **leading experts** in restoration AND preservation of hearing.

Because the field is developing quickly and encompasses an ever-growing knowledge base which includes new scientific insights, technologies and materials, HEARRING members' **collaborative research** initiatives are extremely important to the success of each individual member clinic. To meet the challenges of the future, HEARRING will continue to not only develop and advance standards in the field but will also make these standards transparent.

... network with the experts





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1 Introduction

The middle ear implant (mechanically) causes the middle ear structures to vibrate. The amplified vibrations can be adjusted to compensate optimally for different kinds of hearing loss. The implant's direct drive technology is used to treat individuals with mild to severe sensorineural hearing loss as well as those with conductive and mixed hearing loss. This implantable hearing system is for people who cannot use conventional hearing aids (e.g. for medical reasons), or who do not achieve sufficient benefit from them. The middle ear implant is an alternative to acoustic hearing devices or bone conduction devices. Studies have shown that middle ear implantation is a recognised safe and effective procedure.

1.1 Partially implantable systems

The sound wave is absorbed via microphone, processed in the audio processor and then transmitted transcutaneously as a wireless signal to the implant (receiver and stimulator). The signal that is received causes an activation of the inner ear through a defined mechanical stimulation. The audio processor with the microphone(s), battery and transmitter coil is worn on the head. The audio processor must be adapted to the patient's individual requirements. The receiver is implanted into a subperiosteal pocket behind the ear.

1.2 Fully implantable systems

The audio processor is either implanted as a separate module or connected to the stimulator. The sensor for sound reception is also implanted. A transcutaneous rechargeable battery is employed as an energy source. The functional principle is identical to that of the partially implantable systems except for the omission of the transcutaneous signal and energy transmission.

The HEARRING network is committed to the highest standards of quality. In order to ensure a consistently high level of service and the effectiveness of middle ear implantation, and to provide each patient with the best possible hearing implant solution for the treatment of their individual hearing loss, we have established this set of quality standards. The standards are a realistic minimum attainable by all HEARRING member clinics, and should be employed alongside current best practice guidelines.

2 Team Structure

2.1 Structure of the middle ear implant team

A middle ear implant team may function independently or as part of a complete ORL service within a hearing or hearing implant centre, including paediatric and adolescent services. It is a multidisciplinary team made up of the following key personnel:

a. Otologists

The responsibility for middle ear implantation and all completed diagnostic procedures will remain with the surgeon.

The senior ENT surgeon will have advanced experience in otology and middle ear implant surgery.

Newly appointed surgeons will have had extended sub-speciality training at an advanced level in otology and middle ear implant surgery in appropriate specialist centres in their country or abroad. This will include having attended a temporal bone dissection course for middle ear surgeons. Once appointed, a consultant surgeon will work as a member of the consultant middle ear implant surgical team, initially under the mentorship of the senior surgical colleague(s), with at least six months of supervision by a senior colleague for an appropriate number of middle ear operations. The surgeon will participate in the process of auditing middle ear implant cases and in maintaining a database of such cases.

b. Audiologists, Coordinator

These personnel must be qualified to post-graduate level and hold an accredited MSc or similar qualification according to national standards, and have experience with fitting of hearing aids. This must be supplemented with two years of practical experience and a recognised Hearing Therapy qualification.

They will furthermore have extensive clinical experience within the field of middle ear implantation, together with knowledge and understanding of the multidisciplinary areas within the programme. Their role may also include wider research responsibilities. The Coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme and will ensure that appropriate services are provided for each patient through the middle ear implant patient pathway. The Coordinator will have a high level of clinical, organisational, leadership and professional skills.

c. Personnel requirements

Personnel requirements for middle ear implantation should be in line with national standards and guidelines. One person can be in charge of several of the roles described above. All professionals must be suitably qualified, registered with their professional bodies, and compliant with their national requirements. Newly appointed members of the team who are less experienced must undergo an appropriate programme of training and supervision provided by relevant experienced members of the middle ear implant team.

All team personnel must maintain a programme of continued professional development to ensure ongoing competency.

2.2 Middle ear implant team: additional support

The core team should include individuals with skill and experience in fitting of hearing aids, or should have access to this service.

Where the core team does not include professionals from the following services or disciplines it should have access to them as required:

- a. Audiological Medicine
- b. Radiology
- c. Psychology
- d. Psychiatry

Middle ear implant teams may develop partnership services with local services where appropriate. Such partnership services must have appropriate training and expertise.

3 Accommodation (where applicable)

3.1 To ensure ease of communication there should be suitable telecommunication access for hard-of-hearing patients and their relatives. This should include the necessary facilities for the patient to contact the clinic through a variety of modes (e.g. speech-to-text, text-to-text, fax, or e-mail).

3.2 All patient areas should be appropriate to the needs of a hard-of-hearing population. This should include consideration of visual alerts (e.g. patient appointment information), visual alarms (e.g. fire alarms) and appropriate assistive listening devices in the patient clinic.

3.3 Clinic areas should be large enough to comfortably accommodate the patient, family members, clinicians and observers or interpreters, together with the necessary equipment.

3.4 A suitable room should be available for group work, including patient activities and team meetings / training.



3.5 There should be a suitable waiting area near the treatment rooms, large enough and with sufficient comfortable chairs to accommodate the number of people likely to be waiting at any one time. The waiting area should be more than a corridor. Where paediatric services co-exist, a separate area must be provided.

3.6 The treatment rooms should be sufficiently separated from waiting areas so that noise from the waiting area does not disturb the treatment, and privacy is maintained.

3.7 All facilities and rooms must comply with current relevant health and safety regulations and guidelines.

4 Clinical Facilities

4.1 Clinical facilities should be available for:

- a. Pure tone audiometry (including insert ear phones)
- b. Speech perception testing
 - (1) In quiet
 - (2) In noise
- c. Sound field audiometry (including sound localisation tests, if required)
- d. Hearing aid testing and fitting
- e. Probe-tube microphone measurements
- f. Tympanometry
- g. Objective measurements
 - (1) Evoked response audiometry
 - (2) Electrocochleography
- h. Imaging procedures

4.2 Audiological equipment

All audiological equipment must meet nationally recognised standards. Audiological equipment must be calibrated to national standards as required, on an annual basis, using recommended methods, and must undergo a daily on-site system check.

All testing should be carried out according to professionally recommended protocols and procedures.



5 Referral and Selection Criteria

5.1 Guidelines for the referral of patients for assessment of their suitability for middle ear implantation, and patient selection criteria, should be available in writing on request.

5.2 The selection criteria for middle ear implant surgery:

- a.** Patients with sensorineural, conductive or mixed hearing loss; or
- b.** Patients who are unable to wear a hearing aid for medical reasons, or have insufficient benefit from other hearing systems.

Further indication criteria are:

- c.** An insufficient air-bone gap closure from previous middle ear surgery in conductive or mixed hearing loss patients, and
- d.** An increase in speech discrimination ability via mechanical stimulation.

Indication criteria should fall within manufacturers' recommendations.

Referral and selection of candidates should be in line with relevant national standards and guidelines.

5.3 In the event of a patient falling outside of the selection criteria, but being recommended for middle ear implantation by the middle ear implant team, the team should apply to the local funding authority for financial support by means of an individual patient Case of Need, if necessary.

5.4 Patient selection criteria should be reviewed regularly by the HEARRING Group, to inform national authorities regarding recommendations for future developments in this area.

5.5 Acknowledgement of the receipt of the referral to the referring agent must be undertaken according to current targets and mechanisms set by the national Health authority and must comply with local agreements.





6 The Assessment Process

The assessment process shall be performed in the most efficient and timely way possible.

The time frame for the overall assessment process shall not exceed 12 weeks.

6.1 Unless clinically contra-indicated, all patients must have a comprehensive middle ear implant assessment. The purpose of this process is to assess the patient's functional hearing abilities and to determine whether these are likely to be significantly improved through middle ear implantation.

6.2 Coordinated management of the pre-implant assessment process by a named Coordinator is essential.

6.3 Service delivery should consider the aims and objectives of the national governmental authority frameworks.

6.4 For each patient, the assessment track must be followed according to a written check-list and recorded in the patient's hospital file.

6.5 Following the pre-operative assessment, a written report detailing the outcome of the assessment will be sent to the referring agent within appropriate reporting timescales, or within two weeks of a decision being made by the middle ear implant team, whichever is the shortest.

6.6 Waiting times for diagnostic testing and treatment should be as short as possible and comply with current national and local targets. Current HEARRING targets are six weeks for diagnostics and 12 weeks for treatment.

6.7 Details on locally agreed patient pathways should be available on request.

6.8 Fast tracking of patients through the assessment process must be available when clinically indicated.

6.9 Pre-operative assessments should include the following:

6.9.1 Medical

- a. All patients referred to the middle ear implant centre should have a medical consultation with the team Otologist. The Otologist should adhere to the current recommendations provided by the medicines and health care products agency.
- b. The referral of patients for MRI, CT or X-ray is the responsibility of the Consultant Otologist or other locally agreed on appropriately trained and experienced professional.
- c. For each patient, it is the responsibility of the surgeon and the implant team to:
 - (1) Undertake a medical consultation during the assessment process, and pre-admission, to ensure that the patient is medically fit to undergo the treatment
 - (2) Discuss all pre- and post-surgical risks associated with the treatment
 - (3) Obtain fully informed patient consent for the treatment.

6.9.2 Audiological

- a. Each patient must receive a full audiological assessment performed according to professionally accepted protocols.
- b. The audiological assessment must include:

- (1) Otoscopic examination of the ear-canal(s) by microscope or otoscope
- (2) Determination of hearing thresholds bilaterally using pure tone audiometry or other recognised methods suitable for the patient (air- and bone-conduction)
- (3) Objective hearing threshold assessment (should be available)
- (4) Determination of bilateral middle ear function using tympanometric techniques
- (5) Speech perception testing in quiet and in noise.

6.9.3 Hearing aid evaluation

A hearing system trial (bone conduction or air conduction hearing device) should be performed if applicable.

Each patient should have their current hearing aid configuration re-evaluated and where appropriate have the best available new hearing aids fitted or settings revised. The suitability of amplification should be verified.

6.9.4 Communication

Pre-operative assessment may include a full assessment of the patient's communication and social strategies. These assessments may take the form of observation, subjective description, or evaluation using formal test procedures. The assessment procedure will take into account the patient's age and hearing status and will normally include a detailed case history, and an assessment of the patient's receptive and expressive skills.

6.9.5 Psychological status

Some patients will require a psychological assessment. A referral to a qualified psychologist or psychiatrist should be initiated when there are concerns regarding the candidate's mental health, learning ability, personality and motivation, adaptation to their hearing disorder, or unrealistic expectations about middle ear implantation that cannot be addressed through counselling by the middle ear implant programme team.

7 Pre-operative Information and Counselling

7.1 Basic information and counselling should be given to the patient according to a written check-list and recorded in the patient's hospital file.

7.2 Whenever possible, information should be given to patients in an appropriate language.

7.3 Interpreters should be offered as and when required and in accordance with local practice.



7.4 Teams should continuously monitor, review and update the quality and quantity of the information they provide and should have a written protocol to determine what information is given at which time.

7.5 Verbal information should be supported by a written summary for the patient whenever required.

7.6 Throughout the assessment period, patients should have a clear understanding of the main benefits and limitations of implantation. They should demonstrate that they have realistic expectations of middle ear implantation, e.g. by using a measurement tool such as an expectations questionnaire.

7.7 It is recommended that candidates, and where possible a family member / friend, meet adults who have experience with using a middle ear implant. Matching candidates and users in terms of age and duration of hearing loss and type of middle ear implant device may be beneficial.

7.8 Patients' relatives and friends should be encouraged to become involved in all aspects of pre- and post-implant management. This should always be done with the permission of the patient and at the discretion of the middle ear implant team.

7.9 Waiting times for surgery and information about the hospital stay and post-operative follow-up should be outlined at the end of assessment.

7.10 A final discussion between the patient and key team members should be scheduled for the end of assessment, at which agreement is reached about whether or not to proceed.

7.11 If the outcome of the assessment is that middle ear implantation is not recommended for a patient, an exit clinic appointment should be offered to discuss this recommendation and provide patient support. Recommendations for future management should be discussed together with the opportunity for re-referral in the future. These issues must be communicated in a written report to the referring clinician or agency.

8 The Middle Ear Implant Device

8.1 There are different middle ear implant manufacturers currently supplying implant centres. Information regarding the technical specifications of these different devices should be made available.

8.2 The patient should be given further information on the middle ear implant devices currently available, and on their advantages and disadvantages. The patient should be given an explanation as to why they have been offered a particular device, or choice of devices. Written information on the device(s) offered should also be made available.

8.3 HEARRING centres only use and implant devices that are legally approved by national authorities.

8.4 The middle ear implant device offered to the patient will:

- a. Have a proven track record of safety and reliability
- b. Have all necessary approvals (e.g. CE, FDA)
- c. Conform to the recommendations of the national regulatory agency
- d. Have the highest quality clinical and technical support available from the manufacturer
- e. Meet national purchasing requirements, where applicable.

9 Surgery and In-patient Care

9.1 The Consultant Middle Ear Implant Surgeon is responsible for the overall medical care of the patient.

9.2 The surgical team, which may include a suitably trained nurse practitioner, is responsible for conducting a comprehensive pre-operation discussion of the surgical procedure and potential complications with the patient, and for obtaining the patient's informed consent.



9.3 Surgical techniques employed shall reflect the latest technology and be state-of-the-art. Every effort shall be made to protect the patient's inner ear / cochlea.

9.4 The surgeon will continue to monitor the patient's progress during the post-operative period, and will be responsible for dealing with any surgical or medical problems that may arise in relation to the implant.

9.5 Information regarding the outcome of surgery must be documented and should be made available to the audiological and (re)habilitation teams as soon as reliable data are available.

9.6 Prior to discharge from hospital, the patient should receive written information regarding post-operative care of the wound / ear and pain management, and written guidelines on what to do should medical / surgical problems arise.

9.7 Prior to discharge from hospital, advice regarding health and safety with a middle ear implant must be given to the patient, together with the manufacturer's written safety guidelines.

10 Post-operative Fitting and Tuning of the Audio Processor and Rehabilitation

10.1 The audio processor should be fitted and programmed once the patient's wound has healed satisfactorily.

10.2 The audio processor should be fitted and programmed only by experienced clinical personnel (see 2.1.b) who have been fully trained in the relevant protocols and procedures (or by less experienced scientists / audiologists only if under direct supervision).

10.3 Before the initial programming, relevant team members must:

- a. Check the external middle ear implant components
- b. Explain the programming procedures

10.4 Each device should be fitted and programmed according to the manufacturer's recommended procedures and to maximise benefit for the patient. The appropriate number of programming sessions should be offered to each patient according to clinical need.

10.5 A comprehensive explanation of the use of the audio processor must be provided. Patients should be encouraged to contact the implant programme if they have any queries or concerns.

10.6 Printed materials on the handling, operation and care of the audio processor should be issued to the patient and to relatives / caregivers, as appropriate.

10.7 The patient must have open access to the implant centre (or a designated local partner-service) for checking the entire implant system and for reprogramming the audio processor.

10.8 A written report should be sent to the referring agent following initial processor fitting and at the one-year treatment interval.

10.9 A written report should also be sent to the referring agent if any serious problems arise.

10.10 Rehabilitation services should be offered, if necessary. The patient must have open access to the implant centre (or a local partner-service) for rehabilitation and counselling as required.



11 Post-operative Rehabilitation and Assessments

11.1 Following implant surgery, the patient must be examined by the implant surgical team and have open access to additional appointments as required. The patient should be offered open access to further annual medical review, and checks of the implant and audio processor function.

11.2 Appropriate standardised audiological, speech perception, and quality of life measures should be performed after initial tuning, on at least two occasions in the first year following surgery, and at regular intervals to allow progress to be monitored.

11.3 After the first year following implant surgery, the patient should be offered annual audiological review. This can take the form of a clinic-initiated appointment, or patient-led follow-up. Moreover, patients should have access to additional appointments as required.

11.4 It is recommended that the referrer and local involved professionals receive written reports on patient progress

12 Follow-up and Long Term Maintenance

12.1 The patient must have open access to the implant centre (or a local partner-service) for programming and surgical reviews as required.

12.2 Adequate spare parts and replacements of external equipment must be available as required. This service should be organised in such a way that replacement equipment can be issued or dispatched on the same or the next working day. Audio processor batteries should be available to implant users either from the implant programme or from a local audiology department by prior agreement.

12.3 Individual centres should have a policy for replacement of lost or damaged processors that is equitable for all patients.

12.4 Teams should have an agreed-upon strategy for upgrading audio processors and contralateral hearing aids.

12.5 Arrangements should be in place to upgrade the audio processor for each patient at intervals of no more than 5 years, subject to new technology being available for the relevant implant system.

12.6 Following the annual review, a written report detailing the outcome of the review should be sent to the referring clinician or institution.

13 Device Failure

13.1 If an internal device failure is suspected, the patient should be offered an appointment promptly (within one day) to check the device's internal and external components.

13.2 The implant manufacturer should be contacted regarding investigation of the device failure. If indicated, a clinical / engineering representative from the company should be available at the patient appointment to provide support.

13.3 Upon confirmation of internal device failure, the clinical personnel (see 2.1.b) must inform the Otologist Surgeon and an appointment with the implant Otologist Surgeon should be offered to the patient, to discuss re-implantation or other options.

13.4 The device failure should be reported to the relevant national authorities.

13.5 If re-implantation is agreed upon with the patient, it should be carried out as soon as medically possible and appropriate, to minimise auditory deprivation.

13.6 Re-implantation and programming should be carried out as detailed above. Further rehabilitation needs should be assessed and provided for as appropriate.

14 Clinical Management

14.1 All aspects of the middle ear implant service should have adequate systems of record-keeping, to facilitate auditing and planning.

14.2 The implant programme should perform regular audits and comply with the requirements of the responsible national authorities.

Audits should cover:

- a.** Clinical activity
- b.** Staffing levels
- c.** Patient performance outcomes
- d.** Medical and surgical complications
- e.** Device failures
- f.** Research interests and outcomes
- g.** Patient feedback on the service


15 Transfer of Care (national)

15.1 A protocol must be in place to transfer the ongoing care of adolescent middle ear implant users into the adult section or programme at an appropriate age. The protocol must take into account their educational needs and must be agreed upon by the middle ear implant team.

15.2 A protocol must be in place for the transfer of care of an adult to an alternative programme or the acceptance of care of an adult from an alternative programme, if requested.

15.3 Patients will usually be referred to the nearest middle ear implant centre, unless the patient or family request to be transferred to a particular centre.





15.4 The referring centre will confirm that they can support the type of device used by the patient before the referral is made.

15.5 All the relevant documentation will be sent to the receiving centre. This will include: full details of the patient's address, telephone number, and email address, information on the internal device and external processor used, recent programmes, aided audiograms, speech perception results, rehabilitation reports and results, medical details of surgery and any complications, and contact details for the GP.

15.6 The receiving middle ear implant programme will acknowledge the referral in writing and confirm that the funding has been agreed on for continued support of the patient.

15.7 Generally, patients will not be referred to another centre less than one year after implantation. This is to allow for post-operative medical follow-up, the establishment of suitable device programming, and the provision of initial rehabilitation.

16 Feedback and Complaints

16.1 Documentation provided by the middle ear implant programme should include written information about the complaints procedures within the hospital and other relevant services.

16.2 Patient and caregiver feedback should be systematically collected to inform service review, and should be managed according to local policy.

Acknowledgement

The "Quality Standards for Middle Ear Implantation" were developed by Prof. Dr. Benoit Godey and the HEARRING Group, based on the ADANO guideline for active implantable hearing systems for hearing disorders.