

MEDIA RELEASE

Oticon Foundation in New Zealand
Wednesday 19 June 2013

NEW RESEARCH REVEALS SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' SENSITIVITY TO NOISE

A University of Auckland Audiology Masters student has been recognised for new research into secondary school teachers' sensitivity to noise.

The research reveals secondary school teachers experience stress, anxiety and fatigue when working in noise and for those with sensitivity to noise this impacted on a teacher's ability to teach effectively.

Katie Bridger, Audiologist with Bay Audiology in Takapuna Auckland has been awarded the Oticon Foundation Prize.

The research into the difficult and still relative unknown condition of hyperacusis – reduced tolerance to certain sounds - looked at whether teachers of particular subjects or those with particular personality traits were more at risk than the general population.

It came about after an increased number of teachers came to the University of Auckland Audiology clinic with serious concerns about their tolerance of noise.

The main findings were:

- secondary school teachers in this study reported a moderate to high level of noise sensitivity; this suggests that the teaching population in New Zealand may have a higher sensitivity to noise than the general population.
- noise sensitivity increased in those teachers with higher anxiety levels; however it's currently unclear if one causes the other.
- teachers who spend longer hours teaching in an uncomfortably loud environment (teaching noisy subjects such as music or engineering) were more likely to have a higher noise sensitivity score.
- the most consistent finding from the face-to-face interviews was that stress, anxiety and fatigue were associated with working in noise and having noise sensitivity, and this impacted on the teacher's ability to teach effectively.

Ms Bridger recommends a nationwide study on the prevalence of noise sensitivity be carried out. She also recommends measuring noise levels that teachers are exposed to at work so noise sensitivity management plans can be put in place.

"The Oticon Foundation exists to support projects and research that improve the lives of the hearing impaired. The Oticon Foundation Audiology Prize for a student studying audiology at the University of Auckland helps recognise those just starting out in their careers," says Karen Pullar, Secretary to the Oticon Foundation Trustees.

Her thesis received the highest grade and best examiner's comments for her year. The award was presented to Katie at the University of Auckland on 19 June.

Ends

A copy of the research is available at the University library.

For more information please contact:

- Karen Pullar, Secretary to the Oticon Foundation in New Zealand, email info@oticon.org.nz, Phone 021 647 330 or 04 473 3330, www.oticon.org.nz
- Katie Bridger (Bay Audiology), email Katie.Bridger@bayaudiology.co.nz
- Mary O'Keefe (University of Auckland) m.okeefe@auckland.ac.nz