

### **Hearing Therapist Tinnitus Training – March 2013**

Tom Nesor, Clinical Psychologist to the Hearing Therapists Association of New Zealand



Tom Nesor, Clinical Psychologist, spoke to Hearing Therapists at their recent National Life Unlimited Hearing Therapy in-service in Hamilton (March 2014) on tinnitus. The Hearing Therapists Association of New Zealand received a grant from The Oticon Foundation to support this presentation which provided a professional development opportunity to improve Hearing Therapists skills in providing tinnitus management and information to clients with heightened tinnitus. Currently members of the association provide aural rehabilitative services under the National Ministry of Health contract with Life Unlimited Hearing Therapy services.

Tom's presentation encouraged the participants to look outside the square to maximise effective interventions. He shared that therapists might experience the feeling of failure when they are unable to work a miracle. He noted that it is a curious paradox in being helpful- that we actually don't need to over try to get it right. The best is what is feasible and practical and varies with each therapist's personal internal standard. Tom encouraged the group not to take the situation too seriously as when we do we can stifle creativity.

Three therapists' case studies were shared to illustrate pitfalls around 'difficult tinnitus experience' for clients who had tried everything, they said, to get rid of their distressing tinnitus and wanted a magic solution from the hearing therapist. Tom advised therapists to ask, 'what did you do (to lessen tinnitus noise) and explain why it did not work?', and to challenge clients to re-evaluate their priorities.

Hearing Therapists can improve their skills to help clients with "challenging tinnitus" when they try to embody what they believe. Improving skills is about considering what behaviours and actions will show that people matter. It also includes reflection on how competent and helpful we are vs managing those inner doubts and uncertainties. A vital link to positive outcomes for tinnitus clients is how well does the therapist convey hope for improvement and consequently how do they

encourage and motivate clients. Tom stated this needs to be done “without lecturing or ignoring the clients’ experience”.

Hearing therapists can provide an important role by validating the clients’ stories by taking them seriously. Tom says, ‘Every person has their story and every story matters to that person.’ Encouraging clients to ‘tell their stories’ will help them cope on a daily basis. Every person is wired to be connected to others, so the more connections the better we are able to connect and to better cope with stress. Sharing a story of a person, ‘similar to you’ may help, also. .

Tom spoke on the importance of using breathing to calm the body - if we are anxious we breathe faster and erratically. He recommended that we breathe in for five seconds and out for five seconds, for up to five minutes. Make sure this is done in a quiet, relaxed way. He suggests that, if people are feeling very relaxed their tinnitus feels better (less intrusive) and conversely, if not relaxed but anxious, tinnitus increases (is louder and more intrusive).

There can be a danger that clients will think that because they have tinnitus they cannot enjoy life and therapists can help dispel this thought. Tom spoke of a woman who had a degenerative, painful back condition yet she radiated a sense of peace and wholeness. Tom recommended that every time tinnitus ‘invades’ to think of a pleasurable experience.

Currently members of the Hearing Therapist Association of New Zealand work for Life Unlimited Hearing Therapy Services. Hearing Therapists provide a number of aural rehabilitation services one of which is tinnitus management and information. The service is funded under a Ministry of Health contract and is free to all NZ residents over 16 years of age. The service contact details can be found at [www.hearingtherapists.org.nz](http://www.hearingtherapists.org.nz)

Anne Greatbatch

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