

MEDIA RELEASE

Oticon Foundation of New Zealand

Friday 11th July 2008

Caution for New Zealand Newborn Screening Programme

An international expert on newborn hearing screening is advising New Zealand to ensure there is consistent and ongoing follow up of the newborn once hearing impairment has been detected.

New Zealand's newborn hearing screening programme is under the spotlight at the New Zealand Audiological Society Conference in Christchurch over the next three days.

The Society and the Oticon Foundation have brought Professor Martyn Hyde from the University of Toronto's Departments of Otolaryngology, Public Health Sciences and Speech Language Pathology as keynote conference speaker.

"One major issue we are dealing with in Canada is ensuring the newborn gets appropriate, consistent follow up once they have been screened," says Professor Hyde. "It's crucial that they don't drop out of the system."

"We know that if a child receives a hearing aid or cochlear implant early they can develop relatively normal spoken language and literacy and improved socialisation," says Professor Hyde.

"Having a seamless chain of care and the right information and ongoing engagement with parents are key to a successful newborn screening programme."

Professor Hyde is urging the New Zealand audiology profession, physicians and hospital and health officials to ensure their ongoing support and involvement is locked in as part of the screening programme.

Ontario, Canada's largest province, has had a universal newborn screening programme since 2002. Newborn screening is currently being rolled out in New Zealand and is expected to be available throughout New Zealand by next year.

"Without newborn screening, hearing impairment would only be detected when a child had an obvious problem," says Professor Hyde. "This often represented itself in concerns about development, behaviour and language.

"In Canada the average age of detection of hearing loss has been cut from 2-and-a-half years to about 3 months thanks to newborn hearing screening" says Professor Hyde.

Oticon Foundation Secretary Karen Pullar says it's important to have the insights and value that Professor Hyde can add to the local newborn screening programme.

"We have this opportunity to learn from overseas experience as we roll out our screening programme in New Zealand, and would be wise to act on those lessons," says Ms Pullar.

Professor Hyde was instrumental in setting up the Ontario newborn screening programme (Infant Hearing Programme). He is speaking at the New Zealand Audiological Society Conference about the key ingredients for a successful programme and challenges.

The Oticon Foundation in New Zealand was established in October 1976. It is a charitable trust of Oticon New Zealand Limited and aims to improve the lives of the hearing impaired in New Zealand through communication and knowledge. It is committed to finding better solutions to hearing loss and strives to increase public awareness and understanding of hearing impairment.

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