

Early hearing identification and intervention programmes: an Italian analysis

Preface

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Acta Otorhinolaryngol Ital 2016;36:1-2

Permanent deafness is the most common sensorial defect in childhood and predisposes to communicative-behavioural problems and impaired psychosocial conditions that can persist in adolescence and adulthood.

Universal Hearing Loss Screening (UNHS) programmes have already demonstrated their efficiency and quality. Many papers in the international literature have been published that demonstrate the efficacy of universal auditory screening in terms of quality of the child's life, economic costs and social consequences. It is necessary to ensure that every infant has an equal chance to receive an early diagnosis of hearing loss and early audiological rehabilitation to prevent disabilities related to auditory impairment and eventual general handicap.

At present, UNHS can be considered in most Italian regions as a major health advance. However, this screening the five not been uniformly and fully realised in all Italian regions. Many problems are related to the organisation of auditory screening and several criticisms remain to be resolved.

In March 2014, the CCM (Centro Controllo Malattie or Disease Control Centre) of the Italian Ministry of Health funded a project entitled "Preventing Communication Disorders: a Regional Program for early Identification, Intervention and Care of Hearing Impaired Children". The project involved five tertiary centres with UNHS programmes formally approved by the Region of belonging. The centres involved in the projects are the following: (1) Audiology and Otolaryngology Unit, Department of Paediatrics, Research Institute and Hospital for Maternal and Child Health - IRCCS "Burlo Garofolo" – Trieste (Head of the Unit, Scientific coordinator and local supervisor of the project: dr. Eva Orzan); (2) Department of Head and Neck Surgery, Department of Head and Neck Surgery – Otorhinolaryngology Catholic University of the Sacred Heart "A. Gemelli" Hospital, Rome (Local Supervisor of the project prof. Guido Conti, Director of Department: prof. Gaetano Paludetti,) (3) Otorhinolaryn-

gology Clinic, University of Perugia, Perugia (Local Supervisor of the project and Director of the Clinic Prof. Giampietro Ricci); (4) Otolaryngology and Cochlear Implant Unit, Santobono-Pausilipon Children's Hospital, Naples (Local project Supervisor and Head of Unit Dr. Antonio Della Volpe; project collaborator Dr. P. Siani) (5) Operative Unit of Otorhinolaryngology, Audiology and Phoniatics, University of Pisa, Pisa (Local Supervisor of the project and Head of Unit: Prof. Stefano Berrettini).

The aim of the project is to ameliorate public healthcare practices on childhood deafness with special attention to diagnostic and treatment innovations, family empowerment, treatment alliance and interdisciplinary approach. The final purpose is to establish an integrated regionally-based public healthcare model for identification, diagnosis and intervention of childhood deafness.

The study group used SWOT analysis in order to identify current organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. SWOT analysis is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strength (characteristic of a project that give an advantage over others), weakness (characteristic that place the project in a disadvantage if compared to others), opportunities (element that the project could exploit for an advantage) and threats (elements in the environment that could cause troubles) of the project. This kind of analysis serves to specify the objective of the project and to identify the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to reach the objective.

The first phase of the project, described in the following articles, investigates the state of the art of UNHS and leads to recommendations and standardisation to improve the identification, diagnosis, therapy and care of deaf children.

A specific target for SWOT analysis was identified for each area of childhood deafness. A group of competent professionals from the five tertiary referral centres performed nine different SWOT analyses to evaluate the or-

organisational capacities and realistic possibilities for implementation of the project, especially concerning early intervention in all Italian regions.

The present monograph is divided into nine different chapters corresponding to the nine SWOT analyses performed by the different groups: planning early audiological programmes, screening, surveillance, audiological diagnosis, aetiologic diagnosis, hearing aid fitting, cochlear implantation, early care, follow-up and family support.

Each chapter has been written with great accuracy by a panel of experts and with an updated review of the literature. The result is a critical full paper for the reader who wants to learn more about the topic.

The requirements for effective organisation of the professional network have been detected in all nine analyses, stressing that communication and education are the fundamental strengths of organisational healthcare management for childhood deafness.

It is a privilege for me to be the Editor of this important monograph, and I appreciate the effort made by the working Italian group from five Italian research groups. I hope that this monograph will be useful to the Italian societies of otolaryngology and audiology, and to all specialists involved, in order to guarantee the implementation of early intervention programs in every Italian region and to improve the management of deaf children at all levels.