About the National Hearing Day

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine

March 12, 2021

The 24th National Hearing Day, on March 11, 2021, is an opportunity to recall the place of hearing in the health of French people, especially since during the Covid-19 pandemic some pathologies may have been neglected.

*At birth*, hearing loss must be screened, otherwise at risk of diagnosis delays which would no longer make it possible to effectively counteract its dreadful effects. The French National Academy of Medicine has recommended this screening as well as cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection screening (1).

The first few years of life bring their share of nasopharyngeal and otitis inflammatory reactions. In this period, the "physiological adaptation" of the infant then of the small child to the environment should not be mistaken with the existence of a real pathology: general practitioners, paediatricians and ENT specialists are confronted with this error on a daily basis.

*At the age of entry into primary school*, i.e. 6 years old, otitis manifestations and hearing disorders, whatever they may be, are no longer physiological. Therefore, any such event requires a consultation in an ENT environment, that’s when the school doctor can play a major role in screening. Unfortunately, the French National Academy of Medicine has noted (2) the disastrous state of school medicine and recommended, among other things, to urgently remedy the shortage of doctors in the National Education system.

It is often observed that many adolescents and young adults live permanently or almost permanently equipped with headphones playing loud music. This overpowering and long-lasting listening can damage peripheral cochlear structures when the intensity limitation standards are bypassed or not respected. In fact, such listening has a very strong impact on the social behavior of these people "isolated in their noise" and causes an "auditory fatigue" which inevitably
leads to an early deterioration of their hearing performance. This simple fact emphasizes our duty to inform them.

Throughout adulthood and up to the time when the first outrages of ageing appear, any auditory manifestation must lead to a consultation in an ENT environment, especially if the signs are unilateral: chronic otitis and its functional sequelae, trauma after-effects, tumor pathologies, syndromic diseases... are the prerogative of otologists, whose therapeutic "tools" have progressed in recent years.

Finally, presbycusis occurs, often accompanied by its tinnitus procession. It affects 6 million French people... Insidious, hidden, compensated, often denied, treated too late, it leads to social isolation. It must therefore be treated very early, especially as technological progress has made hearing aids really effective and as the financial obstacle has been removed by the introduction of the "zero charge" in 2020. A novelty unfortunately poorly understood: an "IFOP/JNA" survey conducted among a sample of 1005 people representative of the French population aged 15 and over revealed that 49% of those questioned had not heard of the hearing aid reimbursement scheme. Of these, 61% are working class and 69% belong to the poor categories. When chosen and then fitted, hearing aids require a time of adaptation from the patient and a great deal of skill and availability from the hearing aid specialist.

Throughout life, preventive medicine should improve the future of hearing, but this prevention is only effective if hearing remains a permanent concern. In particular, it is important to know that:

- the "Saturday night noise trauma" is making people deaf and subject to tinnitus younger and younger,
- noise in the workplace is an increasingly frequent and intense aggression, but still rarely leading to recognition as an occupational disease,
- despite extensive regulations, the impact of noise at home on health is often not enough taken into account (3).

The French National Academy of Medicine stresses the importance of "thinking" about hearing, throughout life, and recalls the need to:

- ensure the efficiency of systematic birth screening throughout the country,
- introduce systematic screening for CMV infection at birth,
- restore the status of school doctor,
- quantify noise pollution from the earliest age, to reduce and control it
- establish the conditions for a systematic assessment and follow-up of the auditory state for the entire population at the age of 60,

- inform patients, through health professionals, of the possibility of countering the deleterious effects of the presbycusis, emphasizing the absence, now acquired, of financial obstacles.

1. Report of November 12, 2019 "Fetal audition and cytomegalovirus infection"
2. Report of October 24, 2017 "School Medicine in France"
3. Report of June 5, 2012 "Home noise pollution due to neighborhood activities - Analysis and control"

Press release of the Academy's rapid communication platform validated by the members of the Board of Directors on March 12, 2021.