

POSITION STATEMENT

TITLE: COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

ISSUE:

Cochlear implants are an issue on which various views are held. The Deafness Forum's By-Laws set out a Working Protocol to Protect Minority Viewpoints. This protocol has previously been invoked to establish a position in respect of cochlear implants, through which no position was taken and only factual information was provided. For some time, the World Federation of the Deaf and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing have been understood to be working together to develop a policy in respect of cochlear implants. The Deafness Forum had been awaiting developments prior to reviewing its own position on this issue. However, it subsequently was decided that the Forum should not wait any longer.

At the 2nd National Deafness Sector Summit in October 2001, one delegate argued for the hearing industry to refer people identified as possible cochlear implantees to sources that enabled them to explore all the options available to them. At the immediately following Board meeting, the Board determined to proceed with its own review of the existing Position Statement and requested the CEO to draft a Position Discussion Paper for consideration, reflecting the views expressed. That Position Discussion Paper was prepared and circulated for discussion amongst all known organisations in the broad deafness sector.

The general view within Deafness Forum's membership now would seem to be that the decision as to whether or not to have a cochlear implant, or arrange one for a child, is a matter of personal decision for the individual concerned, or for their parents while a child is of an age where parents make decisions for them. However, in making any decision it is considered essential that the decision maker have the best possible factual information on which to base that decision. That means they should be able to obtain non-biased information from all relevant sources about all the options (or choices) available to them. For children in particular, these options would include living with deafness and receiving a bilingual/bicultural education enabling the child to make subsequent decisions of their own regarding their preferred methods of communication in particular situations. Information regarding options such as lipreading and Auslan must be available along with information about cochlear implants.

The Deafness Forum already has a number of other relevant Position Statements, namely:

- That Australian Hearing should continue to publish Choices, showing the curricula for all schools.
- That all education authorities should establish programs designed to provide parents of children who are Deaf or hearing impaired with non-biased advice.

- That all medical authorities and deafness sector organisations should provide non-biased advice to parents regarding education options for Deaf or hearing impaired children.
- That the Deafness Forum accepts the Australian Consensus Statement on Neonatal Hearing Screening (Adelaide, March 2001), with the addition that universal screening must be culturally appropriate and reach all areas of the population (including ESL, ATSI and those in rural and remote areas).
- That school health surveillance should be reinstated, conducted in conjunction with other relevant programs (e.g. immunisation programs).
- That the following education expectations should be met -
 - the use of interpreters where needed and requested.
 - provision of information about teaching methodologies in a non-biased format.
 - full participation and inclusion of students in curricula/extra curricula activities of an educational facility, including life skills and socialisation.
 - Students become successful members of society.
 - students who are deaf have full access to the curricula.
 - students who are deaf have access to role models.
 - upon enrolment, there will be a structure in place to prevent harassment and victimisation.
 - each State/territory to have a harassment and victimisation policy for the education of deaf and hearing impaired children.

In addition, the Deafness Forum is currently developing a Position Statement in respect of AUSLAN as a LOTE, a national curriculum to be taught by qualified teachers,

POSITION:

On the basis of the above the Deafness Forum has adopted the following Position that supports the rights of all individuals and parents to make their own decisions regarding cochlear implants, based on the best possible and non-biased advice.

That:

- all persons identified as having a hearing loss for which a cochlear implant might be considered (or their parents in the case of young children) be provided with, or referred to all relevant sources of, non-biased information regarding all options available to them in order that they might make their own well-informed decisions without external pressures,
- all persons, having made a decision for or against the option of a cochlear implant (for themselves or their child), be supported in a non-judgmental way to implement their decision and (if they subsequently so choose) and any later varied decision,
- the Deafness Forum provide non-biased information regarding all possible choices that might be made and encourage the government and all other relevant organisations to do the same, and

- the Commonwealth government implement appropriate programs to ensure all possible options are available as viable choices to all people (including ensuring that the costs of upgrading speech processors is affordable).

For this position statement to be effective, it would also seem necessary to have in place appropriate support mechanisms that ensure the individuals and families concerned receive full support from all relevant sources after making their informed decisions. That is, all organisations in the deafness sector should accept all decisions individuals make regarding cochlear implants and assist the decision-maker in every way. Similarly, if the decision-maker subsequently regrets any particular decisions, they should receive non-judgmental support, including if they wish to adopt a different course.

COSTS OF POSITION:

The only apparent direct costs are the development of material for provision to people seeking it and the provision of staff or volunteers to advise such people. There are, of course, the costs of cochlear implants, bilingual/bicultural education, AUSLAN interpreters, etc. resulting from the choices made. However, such costs already exist and the only change to them would be if the percentages of people choosing one option over another were to vary significantly as a result of all decision-makers being provided with comprehensive non-biased information.

RESEARCH BASIS:

No specific research has been undertaken. The position statement is based on views expressed by members of the Deafness Forum and others in some parts of the broader deafness sector.

APPROVED: Board - December 2002.

REVIEWED: Board - December 2002. 25 October 2004.

DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW: No review currently scheduled.