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The challenges in starting cochlear implant program in non-metropolitan cities of India

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Deafness is indeed a silent disability in many parts of the world and the majority of people who have hearing impairment live in non-metropolitan cities of developing countries. With rising economy and increasing population developing nations have become hub of industrialization; hearing loss is increasing in these countries. In this review, the authors have elected to focus the discussion on non-metropolitan cities of India to frame the challenges of cochlear implants in a developing country. This article reviews the common causes of hearing loss, the challenges faced by those with hearing impairment and why the penetration of these devices is low and also reviews some reasons for the inability of the government to support the implant program in non-metropolitan cities of India. Early identification of hearing is crucial towards ensuring appropriate hearing rehabilitation; it is, however, challenged by various factors, including public awareness, absence of a national new born screening program, accessibility to diagnostic centres, availability of trained personnel and equipment and patient affordability. Cochlear implants are a proven auditory rehabilitative option for individuals with severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss, who otherwise do not benefiting from hearing aids. Nevertheless, only a small percentage of these individuals receive cochlear implants and cost remains a leading prohibitive factor, particularly in developing countries. For example, in India, the personal average annual income is well below 3 lakh whereas these devices cost from 10 to 12 lakhs exclusive of hospital and staff fees. Hence, the technology is virtually unavailable to the masses. To overcome the cost limitation of those who would benefit from cochlear implants countries such as India have started to develop their own indigenous implants.

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