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**Dr Ho Eu Chin wants to help those with hearing impairment and also dispel the stigma attached to it.**

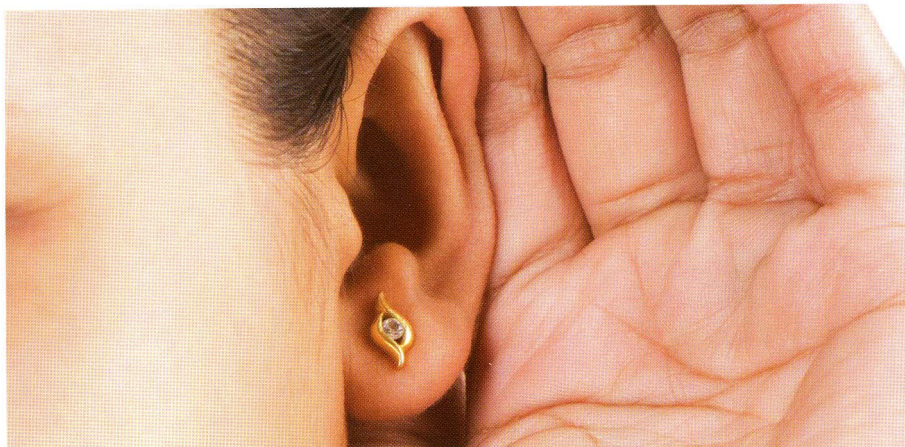
**A**s a junior doctor, I had difficulties deciding on a final career pathway until the opportunities arose for me to observe some operations for restoring function of patients with diseased ears. After I became an Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) trainee, I then found the many sub-specialties fascinating but I kept true to my first love and I finally decided to become an Ear doctor. I was fortunate to have had many opportunities to participate in and later on, led varied research projects that resulted in many publications and conference presentations.

Following my move to Singapore in November 2011, I was able to further pursue my clinical, surgical and research interest in the management of patients with ear diseases. They present with multiple symptoms with the commonest being hearing impairment and balance problems.

While I continue to enjoy operating on patients to improve their hearing, amongst other symptoms; these patients represent the tip of the iceberg of the large population with hearing impairment. Some studies have suggested that 10 per cent of the population have some degree of hearing impairment. Many of them have hearing impairment that is not correctable through surgery or medication.

### Denial and ignorance about hearing impairment

I have made many interesting observations of the public's perception towards hearing



# Research on hearing impairment in Singapore

impairment and the seeking of help to overcome this impairment. Many will deny or ignore their hearing impairment. They frequently seek help rather late and sometimes they come 'dragged in' by concerned family members. Some patients have allowed their 'untreated hearing impairment' to progress to disability and handicap; resulting in underemployment, negative impact on education performance, compromised family and social relationships, occasionally leading to social isolation, and in some cases, accelerated cognitive decline.

Yet, most patients are reluctant to consider the use of hearing aid to regain their hearing. 'People will think I am deaf if they see me wearing hearing aids' is a frequent comment, notwithstanding the irony that people who use hearing aids to regain their hearing are 'no longer deaf'. Negative perceptions about hearing aids abound, with myths and misconceptions.

### Research on hearing impairment

I came to realise that there is a need for a robust advocacy by doctors to encourage patients to overcome their hearing impairment. Yet, in order to improve the hearing health of our ageing population, there remain a dearth of good quality data and information about hearing impairment in our Singapore population, and within Asia, in general. Most good quality studies have been performed in Western populations. The results are not always directly transferable due to significant differences in language, culture and health care provision. A lack of

good quality data also results in difficulties for policy makers to address this problem.

Any studies to understand impairment and disability in the population are always resource heavy and costly to execute. I am very grateful to NHG for the Clinician Scientist Career Scheme (CSCS) that has allowed me to conduct hearing impairment research in Singapore. There are four main components to my research project. One of them will hopefully lead to the validated translation of Quality of Life Questionnaires into the common languages used in Singapore. Concurrently, I am also working with a team of scientists from Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to develop a novel assistive hearing device.

Dr Ho Eu Chin is an awardee of the FY2013 NHG Clinician Scientist Career Scheme (CSCS). To find out more about NHG CSCS, please visit [www.research.nhg.com.sg](http://www.research.nhg.com.sg) (Grants & Programmes).

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