

LETTER FROM KONP Ear Wax Removal Working Group to local KONP groups

27 July 2023

Dear KONP affiliated groups,

New KONP campaign and working group on Ear Wax removal

Concern about audiology services is growing across the UK as privatisation takes hold and more and more High Street opticians are being allowed to provide audiology services on behalf of the NHS.

A requirement to treat resulting from loss of hearing, and the precursor to many audiology interventions, is the removal of wax from the ear canal. Ear wax affects millions of people every year. Removing wax was previously done by GPs but it has been removed from their contract as a core service and they are no longer funded to provide it. This is resulting in many patients having to pay upwards of £55 to have wax removed by private providers. This epitomises the salami-slicing privatisation of the NHS, and the widening health inequalities. Those who can't afford the fee suffer the distressing effects of hearing loss and are at risk of other serious impacts such as infection and permanent damage.

Following a proposal from KONP Oxfordshire, KONP agreed at its AGM this year **to take action on ear wax removal services** (see below for more details). At its last meeting the Steering Group decided to set up **a working group** and would like representation from across the country.

The initial aims of the working group are to:

- urge and support local groups to campaign for free NHS-provided ear wax removal treatments
- work with other national organisations such as RNID, Age UK and Citizens Advice to press for funding for ear wax removal treatment to be included in the General Medical Services contract.

Please contact bmackeith@gmail.com and

- a) tell us about ear wax removal services in your area, and any concerns and/or campaigning about this in your area**
- b) consider nominating someone from your group to serve on the national working group**

With best wishes,

Bill MacKeith

Maggie Winters

John Puntis

Motion passed at last KONP - This AGM calls on KONP nationally to:

- urge and support its local groups to campaign for free NHS provided ear wax removal treatments
- work with other national organisations such as RNID, Age UK and Citizens Advice to press for funding for ear wax removal treatment to be included in the General Medical Services contract
- raise awareness amongst the media and professional journals about the importance of this issue and the impact the lack of service is having on millions of people
- press ministers, shadow ministers and MPs to reinstate a free, universal and NHS provided ear wax removal service

In campaigning, groups could also consider:

- getting GP Surgery based Patient Participation Groups to raise the issue within their ICS
- in the absence of a PPG, activists to explore any opportunity to raise the issue through their ICS
- seek input from advocacy groups who work with the elderly (e.g. Age Concern)
- writing to local Healthwatch and encouraging it to take up as an issue with the ICS

Some further background:

DEAFNESS FROM EAR WAX IS A COMMON AND IMPORTANT PROBLEM. KONP CAMPAIGNS NATIONALLY FOR EARWAX REMOVAL TO BE BROUGHT BACK INTO THE NHS

Hearing and health are intimately linked. Ear wax blocking the ear canal is a major cause of hearing loss but treatment is no longer freely available on the NHS. This is a crucial example of just how easy it is to privatise an essential service resulting in negative impact on huge numbers of people.

- around 2.3 million people in the UK require professional ear wax removal each year
- this was once freely available at GP surgeries but now people are having to pay for treatment (e.g. £55 at Boots and Specsavers); the charge deters many from seeking help and some may resort to potentially harmful self-treatment
- hearing loss is important for lots of reasons – it can lead to withdrawal from social situations, emotional distress, depression and increase the risk of loneliness and of dementia¹; troublesome symptoms can include earache, ringing in the ears and dizziness
- if removal of ear wax does not restore hearing, further investigations are required, and hearing aids may be appropriate for some; wax must first be removed in order for a full assessment of hearing loss
- the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is clear that “ear wax removal should be offered (free on the NHS) where there is clinical need, in primary and community settings”²
- this is not happening in practice because GPs are no longer funded to provide the service
- a survey of 1500 people in 2022³ showed that provision of NHS provided ear wax removal services is at best patchy and at worse non-existent, driving it into the realm of the private sector
- KONP Oxon have produced a report based on local case studies and have been campaigning for two years to get the local NHS to fund a proper service⁴
- KONP nationally urges and support its local groups to campaign for free NHS provided ear wax removal treatments
- work is planned with other national organisations such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Age UK and the National Pensioners Convention to press for funding for ear wax removal treatment to be included in the General Medical Services contract so that it can be done in GP surgeries once again
- this involves raising awareness amongst both the media and professionals about the importance of this issue and the impact the lack of service is having on millions of people, ultimately putting pressure on ministers, shadow ministers and MPs to reinstate a free, universal and NHS provided ear wax removal service
- the RNID has called for ear wax removal to be reinstated as a nurse led service⁵

1. <https://medicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss/>

2. NICE Guideline [NG98], 2018, Hearing loss in adults: Assessment and management. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng98>

3. Access Blocked: The Impact of Cutting NHS Ear Wax Removal Services RNID 2022; <https://rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ear-Wax-Report-FINAL.pdf>

4. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19592953.oxfordshire-campaign-group-demands-nhs-ear-wax-treatment/>

5. <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/primary-care/calls-to-reinstate-nurse-led-ear-wax-removal-in-primary-care-22-12-2022/>