



3.3%

Proportion of people in Singapore with disabling hearing loss who choose to wear a hearing aid.

10%

Proportion of Singaporeans in their 60s who suffer from disabling hearing loss.

Tan Tock Seng Hospital's senior ear, nose and throat consultant Ho Eu Chin doing an ear check-up on his patient, Mr Doraisamy Pillay.
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

Doc: Dementia linked to hearing loss but few use auditory aids

Studies show risk factor but just 3.3% of people in Singapore with disabling hearing loss opt for such devices

Timothy Goh

Mr Doraisamy Pillay brushed off his wife's concerns when she noticed that he had difficulty understanding her.

The school counsellor, who was then 67, chose to believe he was merely inattentive and ignored the advice of an audiologist that he would benefit from a hearing aid. It was only four years later, in the

middle of a counselling session in 2008, that he realised he could not understand what a crying student was saying as he could not hear her.

"It was a terrible shock to me. I couldn't help her," said Mr Doraisamy, who was soon afterwards fitted with a hearing aid.

But his reaction is only too common in Singapore, where just 3.3 per cent of people with disabling hearing loss choose to wear a hear-

ing aid, said Tan Tock Seng Hospital's (TTSH) senior ear, nose and throat consultant Ho Eu Chin.

In comparison, Britain has an uptake of 38.6 per cent, and Japan, 14.1 per cent.

Almost 10 per cent of Singaporeans in their 60s suffer from disabling hearing loss, which means they have difficulty hearing conversations in a crowded coffee shop or during a family dinner when several people are speaking, said Dr Ho yesterday, in an interview with the press to increase public awareness of a preventable health problem.

Studies have shown that hearing loss is linked to dementia and is in fact the most important modifiable risk factor for dementia, he said.

The reasons linking hearing loss to dementia are still being studied, but research shows that as many as 25 per cent of cases of preventable dementia would benefit from treating hearing loss, he said.

His own study found that of the patients who had hearing aids fitted at TTSH between 2001 and 2013, 69 per cent were suffering at least moderately severe hearing loss. This is an issue of concern, he said, as it is harder to treat them.

Dr Ho also cited the National Health Survey of 2010, which found that 73.2 per cent of people with disabling hearing loss did not think they had a problem.

He said people should not wait until they perceive the hearing loss themselves to seek help, but should

consult a doctor once their family and friends start noticing it.

There are various reasons patients are reluctant to embrace hearing aids, one of which is that they feel it is stigmatising.

Some say hearing aids are "very noisy", and they should "wait until they really cannot hear" before getting one.

But the issue is more complicated than that, said Dr Ho.

He said complaints about noisy hearing aids have to do with how the brain perceives sound.

Human brains are naturally programmed to tune out background noises, such as traffic or the hum of air-conditioning.

However, as one's hearing deteriorates, the ears no longer detect such sounds. This causes the brain to "forget" how to tune out such background noise.

When patients finally get hearing aids, they are once again able to detect the background sounds but have lost the ability to filter them out. This leads to the perception that hearing aids are "noisy".

Dr Ho said this problem gets worse the longer someone who has hearing loss is untreated, which is why one should not wait until things get "bad enough" before seeking help.

Some are also concerned about the price of hearing aids, which cost around \$3,000 on average for a pair, according to Dr Ho.

However, there are means-tested government subsidies available un-

der the Seniors' Mobility and Enabling Fund which can greatly defray the cost.

Mr Doraisamy refused to have a hearing aid because he associated it with illness, and none of his older brothers had hearing problems.

But the incident in 2008 was a wake-up call. "That's when I realised - if I wanted to continue working, I'd better get a hearing aid," he said.

The hearing aid he has in each ear has "completely changed" his life for the better. He said: "Before, I had a lot of misunderstandings with my wife as she had to raise her voice. My grandchildren would shout at me so I could hear and get scolded for being disrespectful. I didn't want to meet friends because I was afraid I couldn't socialise.

"But now I look forward to meeting people, I'm much more self-confident. I got my life back."

Dr Ho thinks more patients would come around to wearing hearing aids if they were aware of the link between dementia and hearing loss.

He said about half of his elderly patients who were initially reluctant to get them were happy to do so after learning about the link.

He said a "massive education effort", both for patients and doctors, is necessary as the connection between hearing loss and dementia is still not common knowledge.

"A lot more can be done," he said.

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Model of new ERP readers not finalised yet: LTA

Teo Zhuo

Photographs shared online purportedly showing the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) readers that are not actual depictions of the unit, which has yet to be finalised. PHOTO: ROADSSG/FACEBOOK

Photographs shared online purportedly showing the Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) readers that are not actual depictions of the unit, which has yet to be finalised.

The actual units for the next-generation ERP system will be rolled out progressively from next year, the authority shared in a Facebook post on Monday.

"We are still testing the equipment for the new ERP system, which has not been finalised," LTA said, adding that it is aware of photos circulating online.

The images are actually photo illustrations from a 2016 study conducted by LTA.

The study was not released to the public, and it is unclear how the images made their way online.

The Straits Times had reported on Monday that the existing in-vehicle units will be replaced with the new units progressively from next year.

The first replacement will be free of charge. Images of the purported new units have been circulating on local sites like MyCarForum.com



LTA said images circulating online purportedly of the next-generation Electronic Road Pricing reader are not actual depictions of the unit, which has yet to be finalised. PHOTO: ROADSSG/FACEBOOK

and transport-related Facebook pages like Roads.sg.

Some show a rectangular device with a screen displaying the ERP sign and what appears to be the cash balance.

The screen also displays transaction history and parking fee information, as well as symbols suggesting there is the possibility of connecting to a Wi-Fi network and other devices via Bluetooth.

In 2016, it was reported that the new unit will be smartphone-sized.

It will be able to alert drivers of priced roads well in advance, inform them of charges, and provide real-time traffic information.

"Related information such as the progressive migration timeline, processes and the 18-month transition period remains the same as what we have shared three years ago," LTA said in its social media post.

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TESTING STILL ONGOING
We are still testing the equipment for the new ERP system, which has not been finalised.

LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY, which is aware of the online photos.

Fatal crash: Family of late director sues for over \$1m

Charmaine Ng

The family of Irish expat Donough Andrew Keane, who died after a traffic accident on the Central Expressway (CTE) in 2015, is seeking compensation of more than \$1 million from the two drivers involved.

Mr Keane's brother and administrator of his estate, Mr Colin Joseph Keane, has filed a claim against taxi driver Ko Ngak Phweng and part-time driver Tan Yeow Kim for damages and the loss suffered by his parents from their negligence.

According to court documents filed by the plaintiff, the late Mr Keane was working as a director of information technology at Singtel and earning a monthly average of \$20,372, including allowances.

As a result of the accident, his life was "considerably shortened" at age 41 and his aged parents who were dependent on him have suffered, said his brother, who is represented by Mr Nandakumar Renganathan and Ms Shalini Mogan from RHTLaw Taylor Wessing.

On May 6 that year, Mr Ko was ferrying Mr Keane and another passenger, Mr Anthony Gerard John Hall, from the airport to Cairnhill at around midnight.

While travelling on the CTE, the taxi driver failed to see a limousine that had stopped in the left-most lane, and crashed into the black Mercedes-Benz driven by Ms Tan.

Ms Tan was driving Mr Charles Robert Allenbach Jr to his Bukit Timah home when she missed the Bukit Timah Road exit, stopped the

car, and reversed against the flow of traffic to get to the exit.

In October 2016, Mr Ko admitted failing to keep a proper lookout and by the time he saw the Mercedes, it was too late to stop. His taxi hit the back of the car, which surged forward and hit a bollard.

While the other two passengers survived the collision, Mr Keane was pronounced dead at Tan Tock Seng Hospital at around 2.20am.

Mr Ko, then 58, was sentenced to three weeks' jail and banned from driving for five years, while Ms Tan, then 57, was sentenced to four weeks' jail and banned from driving for five years for dangerous driving.

Relying on the fact that they had pleaded guilty to their offences, Mr Keane's brother is seeking damages in excess of \$1 million, including a monthly \$1,500 allowance to each parent since the death of Mr Keane in 2015 and up to 10 years following the completion of the lawsuit, as well as funeral expenses and grief counselling for his parents.

Mr Ko, represented by lawyers from United Legal Alliance, and Ms Tan, represented by lawyers from Tan Kok Quan Partnership, have denied the claims. They both note that Mr Keane was himself negligent in not wearing a seat belt.

Ms Tan added that while she had pleaded guilty to the offence of dangerous driving in relation to the same accident, this does not amount to an admission of liability.

A High Court pre-trial conference will be held today.

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