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**Poor Hearing Health Habits Impacting Employees on the Job**

*Employees and Employers Uninformed About Hearing Health Care Insurance Options*

POMONA, Calif., March 13, 2014 – Almost one-third (30 percent) of employees suspect they have a hearing problem, but have not sought treatment, according to new research sponsored by EPIC Hearing Healthcare (EPIC).<sup>i</sup> The national survey of 1,500 full-time employed Americans and nearly 500 benefits professionals also showed that, of those with untreated hearing loss, nearly all (95 percent) report that this hearing loss impacts them on the job.

According to the survey, the most common hearing-related complaint is having to ask people to repeat what they said (61 percent), followed by straining to understand a conversation when there is background noise or other people are talking at the same time (57 percent). Additionally, 42 percent say they often misunderstand what is being said, and 40 percent admit they sometimes pretend to hear when they cannot. Also significant, given how common communication through the phone and on conference calls has become to most businesses, 37 percent of employees report trouble hearing over the phone. (See Table 1 for details.)

“All of these impacts of untreated hearing loss are likely taking a serious toll on employee productivity and the potential for more costly errors or missed opportunities when key information is missed,” said Brad Volkmer, president and CEO of EPIC Hearing Healthcare. “Strain from untreated hearing loss can not only negatively influence an employee’s work product, it can also take a further toll on the employee’s health and well-being by causing excessive anxiety and stress, even contributing to depression.”

According to the Better Hearing Institute, studies have linked untreated hearing loss to:<sup>ii</sup>

- Irritability, negativism and anger
- Avoidance or withdrawal from social situations
- Social rejection and loneliness
- Reduced alertness and increased risk to personal safety
- Impaired memory and ability to learn new tasks
- Diminished psychological and overall health

-more-

## Poor Hearing Health Habits Impacting Employees on the Job – 2

Demonstrating a lack of attention to preventive care and treatment, less than one-fourth of employees have had their hearing checked in the past two years, according to the EPIC survey, and only one out of five people who could benefit from a hearing aid actually wears one.<sup>iii</sup>

According to the National Center on Hearing Assessment and Management, of the people in America with hearing loss, a larger number of employees (one-third) deny or hide hearing loss, and another 30 percent say they cannot afford them.<sup>iv</sup>

Many employees are ill-prepared when faced with the high cost of hearing aids. A large portion (28 percent) is under the false impression that these products are covered under most medical plans or by Obamacare (18 percent), and many more (42 percent) admit they just don't know, according to the EPIC survey. Employers are better informed, but still not completely clear. For example, only 43 percent understand that hearing aids are eligible expenses for FSAs and HSAs. (See Table 2.)

"Employers have a unique opportunity to show their support for hearing health care and help employees overcome financial obstacles by educating employees on coverage options," said Volkmer.

According to Volkmer, financial support can take multiple forms. If an employer's **medical plan** offers coverage of hearing check-ups and/or discounts on hearing aids, employers should communicate this during open enrollment and throughout the year, so employees are well informed. Since many medical plans do not cover hearing health care, employers can also consider offering hearing insurance as a specialty or **ancillary benefit**. These plans can offer access to national networks of hearing professionals, substantial savings on hearing aids, and added protection for the employee, including extended warranties, guaranteed trial periods for hearing aids, and more. Finally, hearing aids are **eligible expenses** for health savings accounts (HSAs) and flexible savings accounts (FSAs). If employers are offering these benefits to employees, they can use hearing aids as an eligible expense example during enrollment presentations, helping to bring further attention to this type of financial assistance.

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**Table 1: Do any of the following describe how your hearing loss impacts you on the job?**  
(Asked among those who suspect they have hearing problems but have not sought treatment; multiple responses allowed.)

I often ask people to repeat what they have said	61%
I strain to understand a conversation when there is background noise or other people are talking at the same time	57%
I often misunderstand what is being said	42%
I sometimes pretend to hear when I can't	40%
I have a hard time hearing over the phone	37%
I frequently feel stressed or tired after having to talk or listen for extended periods	22%
Any of these	95%
None of these	5%

2013 Listen Hear! Employee Survey

## Poor Hearing Health Habits Impacting Employees on the Job – 3

**Table 2: Which of the following is/are true about the cost of hearing aids? (Multiple responses allowed.)**

Response	Employee	Employer
They are covered under most medical plans (NOT TRUE)	28%	16%
They are covered under Medicare (NOT TRUE)	25%	16%
They are covered under Medicaid (NOT TRUE)	22%	14%
They are eligible expenses for FSAs and HSAs (TRUE)	21%	42%
Coverage is mandated under the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) (NOT TRUE)	18%	7%
None of the above	7%	10%
I don't know	42%	41%

### ABOUT EPIC HEARING HEALTHCARE

Founded in 1997, EPIC Hearing Healthcare (EPIC) is the first in the country to provide access to hearing care as an ancillary or specialty benefit. With its extensive network of audiologists and hearing healthcare physicians, and distribution relationships with major hearing aid technology manufacturers, EPIC is now the national leader in hearing healthcare, and the only organization to offer hearing as a fully insured indemnity plan. More information is available at [EPIChearing.com](http://EPIChearing.com).

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**Note: For additional information or images, please contact Kelly Lovato at 412.456.7838 or [kelly.lovato@havasww.com](mailto:kelly.lovato@havasww.com).**

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<sup>i</sup> Online employee survey conducted by Wakefield Research on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare between November 22 and December 13, 2013, among 1,500 nationally representative full-time employed Americans 18+, including oversamples of sub-audiences of up to 101 Hispanics, 110 African-Americans, 100 Asian-Americans, 169 teachers and 100 law enforcement professionals (all employed full-time).

Online employer survey conducted by Source Media on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare December 2013 among 493 benefits professionals.

<sup>ii</sup> Hearingpedia. (n.d.). *Consequences of Hearing Loss*. Retrieved from Better Hearing Institute website on January 23, 2014 [http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing\\_loss/consequences\\_of\\_hearing\\_loss/index.cfm](http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/consequences_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm).

<sup>iii</sup> Statistics and Epidemiology. (2010). *Quick statistics*. Retrieved from National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) website on January 2, 2014 <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/Pages/quick.aspx>.

<sup>iv</sup> For Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. (n.d.). *Facts on Hearing Loss*. Retrieved on February 11, 2014 from <http://michdhh.org/hearing/doc/hearingloss%20facts.pdf>.