

## **Public Health Perspectives on Hearing, Health & Healthcare, Dr. Nicholas Reed, AuD PhD**

Dr. Nicholas Reed, an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins, illuminated the critical intersection of hearing, health, and healthcare in his presentation that shed light on the profound implications of untreated hearing loss on individuals and society as a whole.

The cornerstone of Dr. Reed's discourse was the revelation that hearing loss, once regarded as an isolated concern affecting a minority, has evolved into a pervasive public health challenge affecting millions across demographics. Utilizing both empirical data and anecdotal evidence, Dr. Reed articulated the disparities in hearing loss perception among various demographic groups. Startlingly, while Caucasians, particularly males, were prone to underestimating their hearing loss, black females tended to overestimate it. This underscores not only the complex interplay of cultural and societal factors but also the imperative of tailored public health interventions.

Central to Dr. Reed's presentation was the revelation that the World Health Organization (WHO) recently broadened the criteria for diagnosing hearing loss. This shift, while shedding light on the true magnitude of the issue, also underscores the inadequacy of existing healthcare systems in addressing it. With less than 20% of individuals utilizing hearing aids despite their efficacy, questions arise regarding access to and affordability of hearing healthcare, particularly for marginalized populations.

Dr. Reed discussed the implications of untreated hearing loss on cognitive health and aging. Reed emphasized the importance of hearing in overall health, citing its role in cognitive function and social interaction. However, he very clearly communicated that the studies published linking hearing loss to cognitive decline **MUST** be interpreted from a larger public health lens instead of a direct cause/effect for individuals with hearing loss.

Policy changes, such as the introduction of over-the-counter hearing aids and efforts to include hearing care in Medicare, aim to improve access and reduce stigma. However, challenges remain in patient-provider communication, with hearing loss often overlooked, leading to poorer communication and higher healthcare costs. This revelation, coupled with the stark reality of Medicare's failure to cover hearing care, underscores the urgent need for policy reform to ensure equitable access to essential services.

A critical aspect of Dr. Reed's presentation revolved around the pivotal role of patient-provider communication in healthcare outcomes. He explained how untreated hearing loss and/or inaccessible medical information due to lack of adequate accommodations could engender a myriad of challenges, from miscommunication and frustration to increased healthcare costs and patient safety risks. Furthermore, he emphasized the need for systemic changes within healthcare settings, including the provision of accommodations and training for healthcare providers to better serve patients with hearing loss.

Addressing hearing loss in healthcare settings requires recognition, technological support, and behavioral nudges. Strategies include provider training, reminder signage, and offering accommodations during appointments.

Overall, Dr. Reed's presentation was packed with information, and inspired his audience to take action to improve access to hearing healthcare, and insist on adequate accommodations in all health care settings.