

## EDITORIAL

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Most of us take the ability to produce and understand speech for granted just like the vital process of breathing. But this is a very complex process and plays an important part in the progress of civilization as it provides for exchange of ideas, sharing of experiences and transmitting of knowledge from generation to generation. Impairment of Speech and Hearing can be serious barriers to human communication and self-fulfilment.

While deaf education has a fairly long history in India since 1884, the development of speech pathology and audiology (Speech and Hearing sciences) has been very recent. In fact, this speciality is of recent origin even in the most forward countries where it has been in existence for 3 or 4 decades only.

The Ministry of Health, Government of India, have become increasingly concerned about provisions in India for the rehabilitation of those handicapped due to disorders of speech and hearing. In 1963, Late Dr Martin F. Palmer, the American Speech Pathologist, was invited to advise the Government on problems of communicative disorders. According to his very conservative estimate, about 5 per cent of our population, amounting to about 27 million, suffer from disorders of communication. Recent studies in several parts of the country reported an incidence of hearing problems varying from 16 to 18 per cent among school children in the age group of 7 to 15 years. The problem facing the country in the field of Speech and Hearing is therefore an enormous one, and there are only a negligible number of speech pathologists and audiologists in the country to attend to the needs of such a vast population of handicapped persons. There is therefore an urgent need for trained personnel in this speciality and the establishment of Speech and Hearing Centres.

To meet this need the Government of India have established the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing. The main objectives of this Institute, among others, are professional education, research and clinical service in the field of Speech and Hearing. The Institute is affiliated to the University of Mysore for its training programme and works in close collaboration with the various post-graduate departments of the University of Mysore and the Mysore Medical College. At present, the Institute is conducting M.Sc. and B.Sc. courses in Speech and Hearing and it is proposed to conduct Diploma Courses and Short-Term courses for several levels of education required for different types of speech and hearing workers. As the Institute is the first of its kind in the East there is

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wide scope for development in the field of speech and hearing both in terms of professional service and expansion of frontiers of knowledge.

It would be evident from a detailed study of the organisation and administration of the training programme in Speech Pathology and Audiology and functioning of Speech and Hearing Centres, that Speech Pathology and Audiology is an unitary academic and professional discipline, though it draws heavily from many other fields, both medical and non-medical. It requires adequate autonomy in its academic and professional activities and the necessary financial support. It is desirable that it should have an independent administrative unit within the frame-work of a University or hospital environment. This is a new speciality of equal rank and status in medicine and education. Hence the tendency to include this as a part of any existing speciality will not be in the interest of development of the field of speech and hearing.

The field of Speech and Hearing being a new speciality has to be guarded against unethical practices. The ethical principles are almost the same as for the medical profession which aim at providing the best available attention, treatment and rehabilitation to the client. Whenever necessary, cases should be referred to senior members in the profession and to the specialists in allied subjects in the interest of providing the best for the client.

In the initial stages of growth of this new speciality, persons with little or no professional training in speech pathology or audiology will find it attractive to reap financial rewards exploiting the ignorance of the public. Unethical practices will set in which will create a number of problems and should therefore be guarded against from the very beginning. The American Speech and Hearing Association and also the Indian Speech and Hearing Association, which has been formed recently in 1967 have a code of ethics, but unethical practices are difficult to prove and sometimes too subtle to be recognised as 'unethical'. Only when there is unquestionable ethical practice among the qualified people can this be enforced on others. It is for the members of the entire profession and the allied specialities to maintain a high level of professional ethics and expect others to do the same. Certain hearing aid manufacturers and dealers have salesmen with little or no knowledge of hearing evaluation and correction, who sell quite a few hearing aids, but these should not be confused with trained audiologists. Strictly speaking, only qualified Speech Pathologists and Audiologists and ENT specialists with adequate training in audiology are competent to prescribe the required hearing aid following the usual procedure.

There appears to be some misapprehensions about usefully employing the trained personnel in Speech and Hearing. The need for the speech therapists, audiologists and other level of workers in the field of Speech and Hearing is very urgent and cannot be over-stressed in view of the large number handicapped due to communicative disorders, who need medical and rehabilitative services to make them useful members of the society and productive wage earners instead of being a lag on the society and the economic development of the country. Unfortunately,

the facilities available for rehabilitation of these handicapped persons are not known to the public. Hence it is of primary importance that the public should be made aware of the facilities available for rehabilitation of these handicapped persons and the fact that they could be made useful members of the society if the defect is detected and treated early in life. The All India Institute of Speech and Hearing has been trying to educate the public in this respect in a small way through educational pamphlets, radio talks, and articles in papers, but it is very inadequate. This has to be taken up as a large scale project with adequate funds. Only when the community appreciates the need will there be a demand for trained personnel.

The total programme for the rehabilitation of those handicapped due to communicative disorders has to be dealt with at different levels and situations which have to be organised by the Health Department, Education Department and the Social Welfare Department, which come under different Ministeries. Close co-operation and collaboration of these three departments is essential. It is accepted by all that earlier the defects of communication are detected and treated the better will be the results of rehabilitation. Hence, the screening of the children during their infancy and pre-school age may be looked after by the Health Department through their 'Women and Children Hospital' and 'Well Baby Clinics, School Health Service' etc. The Education Department can actively co-operate in screening the school children for defects of speech and hearing and providing necessary facilities for their education. The Social Welfare Department may be concerned with establishment of rehabilitation centres and schools for the deaf. If all these three departments realise the part to be played by them in the total rehabilitation of this group of handicapped children and adults, there is bound to be a very large need and demand for specialists in the field. In addition, there would be enough scope for private practice in this speciality and the well qualified persons will be absorbed at the training Institutions as teachers and research workers. Thus, the placement and utilisation of qualified personnel in Speech and Hearing would depend on the pattern of development of this speciality. The Ministry of Health, Government of India, have already taken steps for the establishment of Speech and Hearing Units in the country to utilise usefully the trained personnel to attend to millions of persons handicapped due to disorders of communication.