

Trudy Smith

Hello and welcome to this week's NextSense Institute podcast. My name is Trudy Smith and I am the Manager of Continuing Professional Education at the NextSense Institute and I am your host for today. My very great pleasure. I've been joined by professor Greg Leigh and Dr. Rachael Beswick. Can I ask you to introduce yourselves for our audience? Greg, I'll start with you.

Greg Leigh

Thanks Trudy. As you said, I'm Greg Leigh. In my day job I'm director of NextSense Institute, but today I'm talking to you in capacity as Chair of the Australasian Newborn Hearing Screening Committee.

Trudy Smith

Thanks, Greg. And Rachael?

Dr. Rachael Beswick

Thanks Trudy. So my name's Rachael Beswick and I'm the Director of Queensland's Newborn Hearing Screening Program, which is Healthy Hearing. I'm speaking to you today in my role on the Australasian Newborn Hearing Screening Subcommittee, which is responsible for the work associated with developing this consensus statement.

Trudy Smith

Thank you, welcome both. Greg, can you tell me about the Australasian Newborn Hearing Screening Committee who's on the committee and what is the work that you all do?

Greg Leigh

Yeah, thanks Trudy. The ANHSC has been in existence since 2001 when it started life as the National Neonatal Hearing Screening Committee was a group of very committed individuals. I'd have to say you were brought together at that time by a common purpose and that purpose being or a desire to see the introduction of newborn hearing screening in Australia. That started at a conference, what was really the first of our many conferences now as a consensus meeting at Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital in March 2001 brought together medicals, audiologists, nurses, nurse audiometrists, pediatricians, developmentalists. Wide range of people with varying backgrounds who had a very strong interest in seeing the introduction of newborn hearing screen. We had 111, I think, people at that first meeting and that led to the development of a consensus statement on why they should be newborn hearing screening in Australia.

As the record shows, that consensus statement was used over a long period of time as an instrument for advocacy, for the introduction of the board hearing screening with both federal and state governments and over what proved to be a much longer period of time than we may have wished eventually every state in the Commonwealth has reached the point now where there is a newborn hearing screening program in that stable territory.

We now confidently believe that we have more than 97% of all children born in Australia receiving or completing a screen for their hearing within the first three months of after birth which is with an extraordinarily low rate of loss to follow up. I would argue one of the envy of the world in terms of the quality of those programs. So what role is there for the ANHSC now? We've continued over all of that period of time to have a role in advocating for the continuing quality of and availability of those newborn hearing screening programs. And to that end, we have among our main issues, still representatives who are from all of those areas.

We have, as Rachael's just identified as being Director of the Queensland program, we have the directors of all of the state based programs. We have representatives from the field of audiology, from the field pediatrics, from the field of ear, nose and throat surgery, from education of deaf and hard of hearing children, from the perspective of parents. And we continue as a committee with those aims as a working committee of deafness foundation. So our parent body is deafness foundation, but we continue as the Australasian Newborn Hearing Screening Committee.

Trudy Smith

Sure. And there is a workshop coming up on the 22nd of July to progress again, perhaps a new consensus, I'm wondering if you can talk about why this is an ongoing focus for you and the committee?

Greg Leigh

Well, people in the field will know that every two years, ever since 2001, we've continued to have conference as the ANHSC. The hospital on hearing screening conference has become quite a feature in the calendar for people who work in the field on delighted to say. But over many years or recent years and particularly with the advent of the previous federal government's roadmap on hearing health, there's continues to be a desire for or in many cases, seen as a need for screening beyond the newborn period to identify hearing loss in children at a later age or a stage. And what we've seen overall period of time is that there are many different perspectives on what that should look like. Many different perspectives on what, or whether that should be done. Perspectives on when it should be done, should just be a feature of the preschool years. Should it be a feature of the school years? Should it be a feature of multiple points in childhood?

And it's fair to say, there isn't consensus around the issue of later age screening beyond the newborn period, but it remains a very important issue and it remains one that exercises lots of attention, and that we think is absolutely worthy of pursuing to an outcome. And in the same way that we had a role in advocating to government a singular or a united perspective around newborn hearing screening, we think it would be great if we could work towards a consensus nationally on what screening beyond the newborn period should look like. And given that we've played such an important role through conferences and other activities over the years, we've decided to step into this space and provide a vehicle for that discussion to take place, to work towards a consensus.

And to that end, we use some of our rather meager resources as a committee to finance a systematic review of the literature on this topic. We put that out to tender late last year, that tender was won by the National Acoustics Laboratories and NAL undertook that task of completing a systematic review of the literature on newborn... Oh, sorry, on screening beyond the newborn period. And we are using that as a catalyst through this workshop that we are entering into to initiate a day conscious of the fact this is just a start. A day to bring people to together who are significant players in, or who have a significant interest in this issue to consider that review of the literature and to start the process of building the consensus.

Trudy Smith

Sure. Rachael, I'm wondering if you can elaborate a bit more perhaps on the preparation that have been conducted prior to this workshop?

Dr. Rachael Beswick

Yeah, absolutely, Trudy. So we've been working on this for a long time, about 18 months now. Developing all of the work leading into this day. So as Greg indicated, we did commission a systematic lit review, which covers all the literature around detection of hearing loss after the newborn period. We've also conducted two surveys in Australia and in New Zealand. One looking at what screening programs around throughout childhood and then a sub questionnaire, which looked at specifically around the targeted surveillance program and what states and what New Zealand is doing around targeted surveillance. So there've been two large pieces of work. We've also released the systematically review to a number of really key stakeholder groups for their opinion and position on the outcomes of the systematic lit review and are in the process of conducting a number of interviews with these stakeholder groups around their position around what we should do moving forward. So a lot of work happened, Trudy.

Trudy Smith

Certainly does sound like it. What are your anticipated outcomes for this workshop? Greg alluded to this was just at one moment beginning of this process, but I'm wondering if you can talk a little more to that.

Dr. Rachael Beswick

Absolutely. Well, we're under no illusion that we will be having a consensus at the end of a one day workshop. As I said, even the preparation's leading up to it. There has been lots of conversation within the committee, lots of pulling apart our thoughts and challenging ourselves and our own beliefs. So what we are hoping for is a couple of base statements that we can agree on and a plan for moving forward. So what's the next thing that we need to do as a sector to move towards a consensus statement.

Trudy Smith

Sure. Now there will be people listening to you have registered and people considering that, how would you recommend that they prepare before coming along on the 22nd of July?

Dr. Rachael Beswick

So, absolutely one of the number one things that they should do is read the systematic lit review, which will be available to everybody. It's a really good read and it provides a really good foundation for the way the workshop's going to occur. The other thing I think that you need to do is bring an open mind. So, as I said, the committee have been really challenged in their thoughts and beliefs as evidence has rolled in and different people's opinions have come to the table. So I think bringing in open mind and being open to the different positions is really valuable.

Greg Leigh

I really can't stress that enough, Trudy. The idea that there's one way to do this, if there was one clear way to do this, we'd be doing it now, and clearly there isn't. There are lots of perspectives, some of them more strongly evidence based than others, but they're all valid perspectives and they're all important perspectives for us to consider. We're very fortunate that we've procured the services of professor Gill as our facilitator for the day means from the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, well known in the field of ethics as it relates to the field of pediatrics. More broadly links agreement to the facilitator for us as a real bonus and I know that she's going to engage people through the day, but as Rachael says, you can only be as engaged as your open mind and preparedness to engage will allow.

Greg Leigh

So we're looking forward to a really exciting day. Again, endorse, but Rachael said that we're not thinking for a moment, but we're going to wind up with a complete consensus after a one day workshop that let's set the road to achieving that in the near term, we would hope.

Trudy Smith

Thank you both. It sounds like it's going to be a really interesting day. And if you haven't registered yet, we will put the link in the show notes that you can access that and also the systematic review when it becomes available. You so much for joining us and perhaps we can come together after the 22nd day of July and talk about ongoing work. So we appreciate your time now. So thanks everyone for joining us.

Dr. Rachael Beswick

Thanks Trudy.

Greg Leigh

Thanks Trudy.