

Evaluation of Referrals to the Hearing Implant Centre From a New Referral Source: the COACH trial

Fiona Kukiewicz, Terry Nunn, Andrew Soulby, Guys and St Thomas Hearing Implant Program

Introduction

In 2022 Guys and St Thomas (GStT) NHS Trust became a research site for the COACH Trial (Comparing Cochlear Implants with Hearing Aids in adults with severe hearing loss). www.coachtrial.ac.uk

One of the consequences of being a research site for the trial has been the generation of a new cochlear implant referral route. This is characterised by patients completing a research 'expression of interest', then on screening they are found to be eligible for an NHS assessment. We have therefore identified a group of individuals, within NICE criteria for assessment, who effectively 'self-refer' for assessment for a cochlear implant.

Current referral guidance for GStT in common with most UK centres require a healthcare professional referral for NHS funded care. (Fig 1)

Paediatricians
Speech and language therapists
Scientists and technicians
ENT consultants
Audiological medicine
Teachers of the deaf
GPs

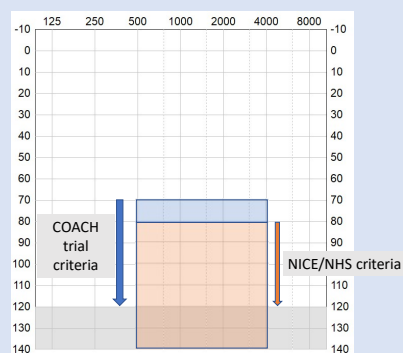


Fig 2: NHS /NICE¹ criteria is shown in Fig 2 with a comparison to the COACH trial criteria. In addition to the PTA the phoneme score on AB words testing is also used:

- NICE/ NHS CI recipients will score <50% phonemes
- COACH trial participants will score <60% phonemes

Methodology

As of August 2025, GStT had received 375 expressions of interest for the trial. Of these 23 were referred to the GStT NHS hearing implant program. Nine of the 23 were already known to the service and are therefore excluded from this analysis. An additional small cohort of participants would be eligible for NHS hearing implant assessment however declined onward referral or were referred onwards outside of GStT. We report on the audiological profile and outcomes of the remaining 14 referred into our own service.

Results

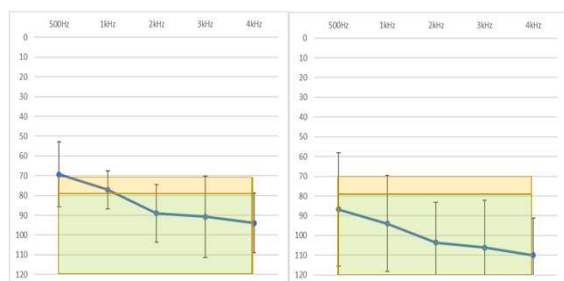
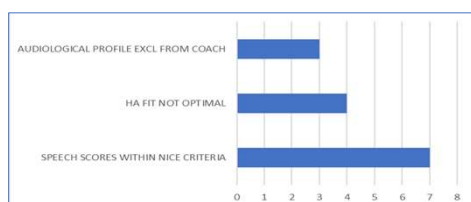


Fig 3: Pure tone Audiometry at referral (n=14). Best ear and worse ear +/-1SD

Reason for referrals (Fig 4)



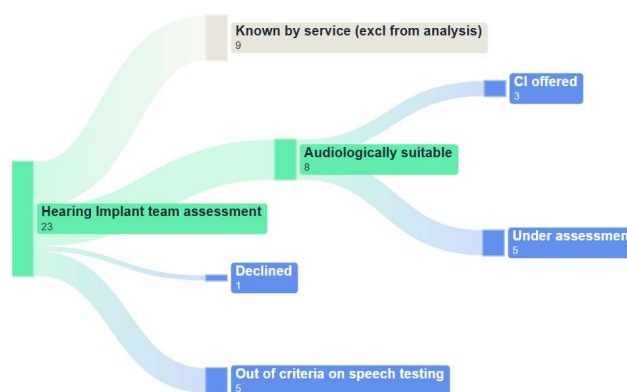
References:

- ¹ Cochlear implants for children and adults with severe to profound deafness. Technology appraisal guidance. Reference number: TA566 Published: 2019
- ² Swords C, Ghedia R, Blanchford H, Arwyn-Jones J, Heward E, Milinis K, Hardman J, Smith ME, Bance M, Muzaffar J; INTEGRATE. Socioeconomic and ethnic disparities associated with access to cochlear implantation for severe-to-profound hearing loss: A multicentre observational study of UK adults. PLoS Med. 2024 Apr 4;21(4):e1004296. doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1004296.
- ³ Hearing loss in adults: assessment and management NICE guideline Published: 21 June 2018 Last updated: 2 October 2023
- ⁴ Cullington, Helen, Dickinson, Ann-Marie, Martinez de Estibariz, Unai and O'Driscoll, Martin (2022) Improving adult CI referral in the UK. British Cochlear Implant Group Meeting 2022: Being of sound health - the life benefits of auditory implants, Cardiff, United Kingdom. 26 - 27 Apr 2022

Demographics

- Predominantly White British which may be a reflection of the self-select nature of a group presenting for research participation.
- Average age =69 years with a SD +/-14.
 - This is broadly similar to that reported by Swords et al 2024² in their analysis of adults fulfilling NICE (2019) audiometric criteria for implant assessment 72 years +19
- Six asymmetric hearing losses (using NICE definition of asymmetry)³
- Majority aetiology unknown with others reported as Meniere's (n=1), Noise exposure (n=1), family history (n=1) and measles (n=1).
- Audiological profiles excluded from COACH: mixed hearing loss; fluctuating hearing loss; electro-acoustic stimulation candidate (EAS) with potential influence on electrode selection.

Patient flow for n=23 referred from COACH to NHS pathway. Fig 5



Conversion Rates

With three patients on the CI op waiting list and five deemed audiological suitable there is a conversion rate of between 21 and 57% for these referrals.

For the same time period the conversion rate at GStT for all CI referrals is estimated at 26% which is in line with other centres reports⁴.

Fig 6: Conversion rates for referrals

GStT Referrals	
June 2022- Aug 2025	678
GStT total adult surgeries	
June 2022- Aug 2025	176
Conversion rate ALL adult referrals June 2022- Aug 2025 (%)	26
Conversion rate COACH referrals to date 3/14 (%)	21
Conversion rate COACH referrals potential 8/14 (%)	57

Outside the scope of this service review are a smaller group of participants who:

- Declined NHS referral;
- Opted for NHS referral to another hearing implant program;
- Met candidacy criteria for other implantable devices and were signposted to those services locally.

Conclusions

A high conversion rate for these patients indicates that those individuals motivated to seek assessment of their hearing, and who are within NICE criteria on a pure tone audiogram, have a high potential of being offered a cochlear implant.