

ABSTRACT

“Say That Again Boss, I Can’t Hear You – Noise Induced Hearing Loss Revealed”

Hearing impairment at the workplace has been noted to be an important medical finding that is often not identified in its early stage. Most workers having hearing problems do not realize the presence of a hearing impairment until it becomes prominent, is noticed by others, or is picked up on medical surveillance. Hence there is a need to identify hearing impairments early in the working life of the employees to prevent further deterioration to their hearing as well as to improve on preventive measures being employed.

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of medical care at the workplace has been towards COVID-19 and infectious diseases prevention. This coupled with long periods of lockdown has caused the management of other workplace hazards to be side-lined. However, with a very intense vaccination program, Malaysia is now moving towards living with the virus and economies have resumed, therefore it is important to recommence all required medical surveillance once again.

Noise induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) is the Occupational Disease mostly reported to the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Malaysia and to that effect, a revision was made to the existing noise regulations resulting in the Occupational Safety and Health (Noise Exposure) Regulations 2019 which was effective 1st June 2019. The regulation introduces a new flow of examination which begins with an audiometric examination that must be carried out by a registered Audiometric Testing Centre. An Industry Code of Practice for the Management of Occupational Noise Exposure and Hearing Conservation 2019 and subsequently Guidelines on Management of Occupational Noise-Related Hearing Disorders 2021 were also developed to assist practitioners carry out their duties.

It is important for doctors to understand the various causes of hearing impairment faced by the working population taking into consideration exposure to loud noises, exposure to chemicals as well as injuries. It is also important to understand basic concepts on exposure to noise at the workplace by understanding noise exposure periods and the effect of the use of hearing protection. All doctors should make it a point to obtain information regarding exposure to noise at the workplace and from outside the workplace when faced with the case of possible hearing impairment.

Noise Induced Hearing Loss is a condition that is permanent and therefore it is very imperative that the appropriate action be taken to identify and manage noise exposure at the workplace through an effective Hearing Conservation Program.

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