

Phone
consultations
with the
many
Aboriginal
patients
who have
hearing loss

By Dr Damien Howard and Jody Barney

Phone consultations

- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic The Australian Health Department has allowed telehealth including phone consultations to be funded under Medicare.
- Many Indigenous people only have phones to be able to participate in Telehealth
- Many Indigenous patients have hearing loss or auditory processing problems that can make phone consultations difficult.
- Dr Damien Howard is a psychologist and Jody Barney is a Deaf Indigenous consultant who have each worked for 30 years in improving communication with hearing impaired Indigenous Australians.

Dr Damien Howard and Jody Barney

Hearing loss is common
Among Indigenous people.
Up to 70% of people in
remote Indigenous
communities are hearing
impaired due to childhood
ear disease.





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Hearing loss and Auditory Processing problems

- Many Aboriginal people experience chronic and persistent middle ear disease in childhood
- This can leave them with some degree of mild to moderate hearing loss or auditory processing problems
- Telephone conversations and phone medical consultations are harder for those with hearing loss.
- It is common that people are not aware that they have hearing loss. They have had problems hearing from a young age so it has been normalized.

Signs of hearing loss in face to face conversations

- Intently watching the speakers face during conversations
- Being quiet and unresponsive during consults
- Often asking for things to be repeated
- Frequently misunderstanding questions
- Poor compliance with treatment
- May bring someone to help with communication in consult



Face watching

Language, Culture and Hearing loss

- People often assume these type of responses are due to only cultural and/or language differences.
- However, hearing loss has often shaped people's limited English and restricted awareness of mainstream ways of doing things.
- Early onset hearing loss makes it harder to learn standard English as well as become familiar with mainstream ways of doing things.
- So when people have limited English and are uncomfortable with engaging with mainstream services they often have a hearing loss and/or auditory processing problems.

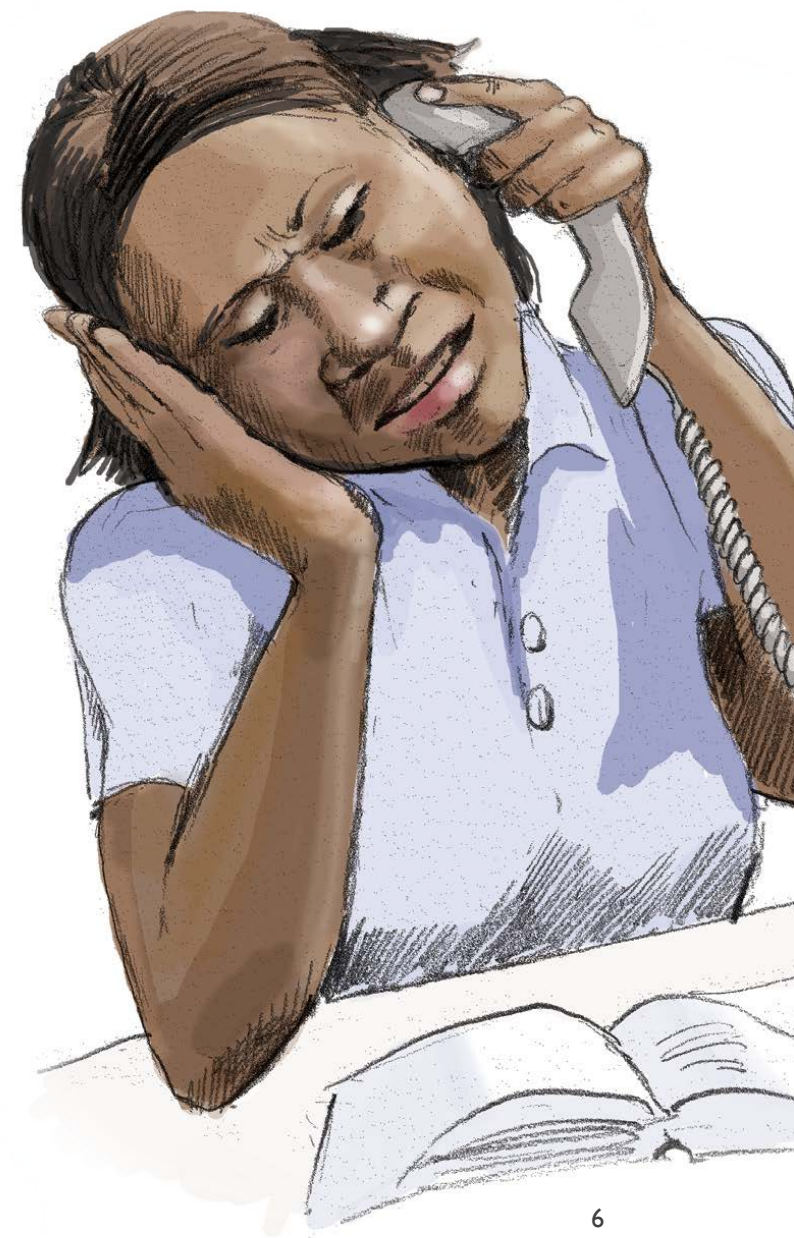


Problems with phone consults for those with hearing loss

People compensate for hearing loss by face watching and reading body language to supplement what they hear.

Because these cues are absent in phone consults people may be uncomfortable with them and avoid them.

Or they may engage little and get little out of consults .



Ways to improve conversation in phone consultations



Ensure there is minimal background noise where you are



If there is background noise around the person you are calling – suggest they move somewhere quieter.



Don't ask 'do you understand'



Do ask 'did I explain that right or should I say it again'



Orientate the patient when you change topic

Use visual prompts

- Visual prompts can help those with listening problems better understand what you are saying.
- Prepare or make illustrations
 - Make your own sketches ,made during the consult with key words.
 - Have on hand illustrations that picture common issues you need to discuss.
- During consult take a photo of illustration and send it to patient as you speak.



Pre-learning

- Knowing what a conversation will be about helps to understand the conversation better when it occurs
- In some situations (like discussing test results) you can prepare people for what will be said.
- If the patient is new, sending a photo of your self and a personal message in the appointment reminder may help encourage the patient to keep the appointment.



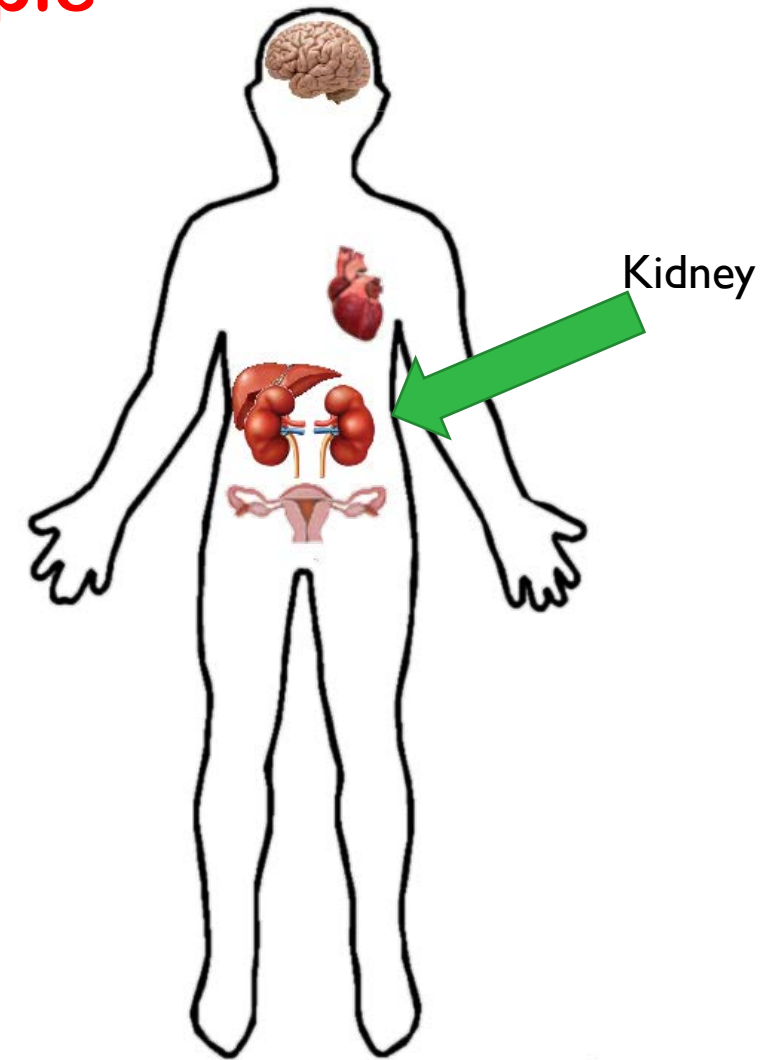
Looking forward to talking to you

I am going to call you tomorrow for our phone appointment

- I want to talk to you about the results that came back from the blood test on your kidneys
 - The kidneys help to keep the blood clean
 - If they don't work properly you can feel tired
 - Your face or body can swell up
 - Your skin may feel itchy
- When I call I will tell you about your results and talk about ways for you to keep healthy.
- Dr Joe Adams

Its ok if you want someone to listen with you to our Phone conversation

An example



Post learning

- Post learning enables someone to clarify their understanding of what was said after a conversation.
- It helps to confirm the person has an accurate understanding of what was said.
- In face to face consults there are informal opportunities to clarify by speaking with a Aboriginal Health Worker or nurse. But these opportunities are lost with phone and telehealth consults. .
- One strategy to enable post learning is for the practitioner to make a short video summarizing the key points of the consultation..
- This is then sent to the phone nominated by the patient.
- The patient can watch and listen again without shame of asking for repetition.
- They can ask advice from other family members who they choose,



Dr Instructions

- (1) Increase insulin dose to 14units at night
- (2) Keep taking tablets everyday
- (3) Reduce soft drinks & increase water intake
- (4) Increase exercise to 30 minutes brisk walk per day.
- (5) Be aware of signs of hypo (low blood sugar)
 - ↳ sweaty, shaky, confusion, dizziness, hungerTreat by checking BGL (low is less than 4) & treat by eating fast acting sugar like 5 jelly beans or 3 teaspoons of sugar or honey then follow up with carbohydrate like a sandwich or biscuits or glass of milk.
- (6) Repeat blood test in 3 months.

EXAMPLE OF AFTER PHONE SESSION NOTE PHOTOGRAPHED AND TEXTED TO PATIENT

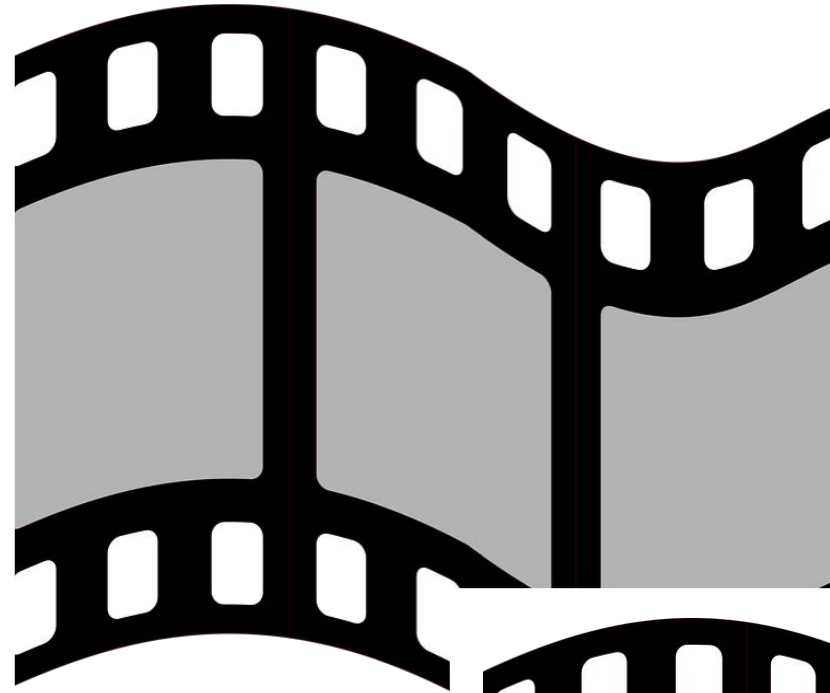
Follow up clarification calls

- Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW) have a range of often culturally derived communication skills.
- They can say things in a way that is easiest for patients to understand.
- They are trusted not to judge a patient who has difficulties in understanding something.
- In face to face sessions they may be sought out to assist with communication
- One way to do that in phone consultations is to ask the patient if they would like a follow up phone call from a AHW.

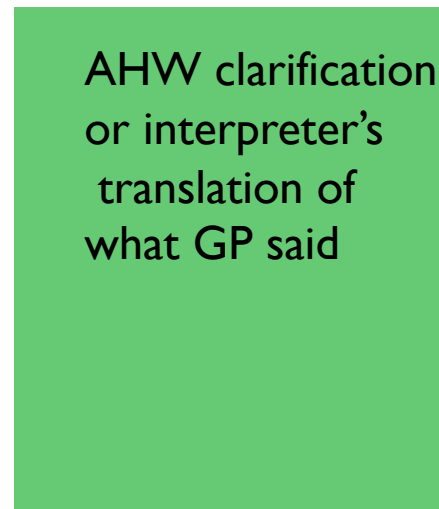
Would you like a follow up call about your phone consult. If you do who would you like to call. Joe or Amy

Utell.online – sharing information easily

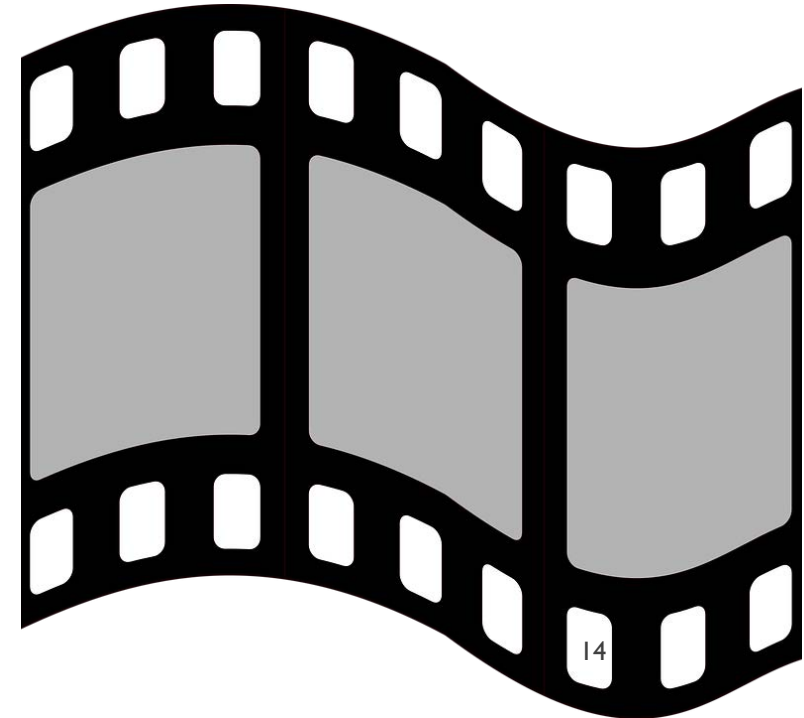
- This is an app that enables you to upload and send two short videos.
 - For example,
 - 1) a video of you summarizing what was said in consult
 - 2) an AHW giving clarification or interpreter giving a translation of what you said
- This can be texted to patients as a single URL
- Go to www.utell.online



General
Practitioner
short video



AHW clarification
or interpreter's
translation of
what GP said



Not only phone consultations

- Wearing a mask
 - prevents face watching to better understand what is said
 - Muffles the voice of the speaker making it harder to hear
 - Online training on video conferencing and face to face communication will be available soon at www.phoenixtraining.com.au



Anxiety



- The worries about the pandemic and rapid changes that have occurred because of it have raised anxiety levels generally
- Those with hearing loss are more prone to experiencing anxiety, especially in the face of rapid change
- Google 'minced words' and 'Damien Howard' for article
- Indigenous people with hearing loss generally have an existing higher base level of anxiety and may experience even higher increase of anxiety about the virus.

More information and resources

contact Damien@phoenixconsulting.com.au

- The 2017 AMA Indigenous health report recommended all workers engaged with Aboriginal people undertake 'hearing loss responsive communications training'.
- The changes in communication processes that have occurred as result of the Covid-19 pandemic make this recommendation more urgent.
- Hearing Loss Responsive Communication Training – including the implications of Covid-19 can be found at www.phoenixtraining.online
- Thanks to Dr Simone Liddy GP and Kristy Day Graphic Artist for their contributions to this resource 17