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### UM study of nursing home patients shows widespread hearing problems

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# University of Montana

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### UM STUDY OF NURSING HOME PATIENTS SHOWS WIDESPREAD HEARING PROBLEMS

MISSOULA--

A recent study of elderly people in four nursing homes in Missoula and Flathead Counties showed that 96 percent had untreated--but treatable--hearing impairment.

The study was conducted last year by four University of Montana graduate students under the direction of Dr. Michael Raffin, UM assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders. Working on the project were Rebecca Bingea and Karen Aune of Missoula, Lisa Baye of Framingham, Mass., and Susan Shea of Edmonton, Alberta.

Dr. Kelly Lyndes, UM associate professor of communication sciences and disorders, had suggested the need for the study after he visited area nursing homes.

He noted that the institutions had been attempting to provide care for their hearing-impaired patients by obtaining outside audiological services. Lyndes said he believes the nursing home officials were unaware of the extent of the problem.

In conducting the Montana study, Raffin said he and his team tested the hearing of 151 elderly patients and examined their ear canals with otoscopes. If the patient had a hearing aid, it was also examined.

Of the 151--representing 53 percent of the patients in the four facilities--only six patients were able to pass a hearing test in which a portable audiometer was used, he said.

(over)

HEARING PROBLEMS--add one

Only 17 of the patients said they owned hearing aids, he said, and none of the devices worked properly. The team reported dead or weak batteries, broken wires and corroded battery terminals.

The report of the study, presented before a convention of the Montana Speech, Language and Hearing Association in Butte last month, details more exactly the types of hearing problems in the patients. Examples are abnormal ear canal or eardrum, and nerve damage. The researchers recommended treatments for the individual patients, such as the fitting of a hearing aid or other appropriate treatment.

The report was accepted for publication in the Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders.

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