

For Immediate Release
March 18, 2008

Contacts: Laurence Hamblen, executive director, (541) 485-8521

Glenda Lonstron, development coordinator, (541) 485-8521
Monica Shovlin, The Ulum Group, (541) 434-7028

Cochlear Implant Services Return to Eugene Hearing & Speech Center

Eugene, Ore.— Eugene Hearing & Speech Center is pleased to announce the return of services for cochlear implants—a surgically implanted electronic device that provides a sense of sound to the profoundly deaf or severely hard-of-hearing. The Center recently expanded its professional audiology staff and now offers cochlear implant evaluations, which include an audiological evaluation and aided speech perception testing. Medical evaluations and cochlear implant surgeries are performed in Portland; post-operative initial programming sessions and follow-up sessions are performed at Eugene Hearing & Speech Center.

“We are very excited to once again provide cochlear implant services to the community,” says Executive Director Laurence Hamblen. “The addition of these services locally means patients can spend less time traveling to Portland, which is a hardship for many.”

A cochlear implant consists of two parts: an internal, surgically implanted receiver-stimulator, and an external speech processor. The speech processor is similar to a hearing aid, but in addition, has a headset coil that communicates to the internal device via FM radio signals. The headset attaches to the side of the head, usually above the ear, and is held in place by a magnet.

The criteria for receiving a cochlear implant in adults are moderate to profound sensorineural hearing loss and limited benefit from hearing aids. Children who have profound hearing loss also can receive a cochlear implant and may undergo the surgery as early as 12 months of age. Early implantation provides exposure to sounds that can be helpful during the critical period when children learn speech and language skills.

To determine candidacy, patients must undergo a comprehensive audiological evaluation, speech perception testing and a medical evaluation including an MRI, CT scan, physical examination and medical consultation. Children must also receive a speech-language evaluation and a psychological evaluation, which are usually offered through the cochlear implant program at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland.

Once eligibility is determined, the primary care physician's office will contact the patient's insurance providers to determine whether the implant is a covered service. The total cost of the implant, including the device, hospital fees, surgical fees, and programming for the first year is approximately \$60,000. At this time, the procedure is covered by most insurance companies, including Medicare and Medicaid. Eugene Hearing & Speech Center urges all interested candidates to contact their insurance providers to determine whether cochlear implants are a covered item in their policy. The surgeon's offices will obtain prior authorization for the surgeries when needed. Once authorization has been obtained, a surgery date is scheduled.

For more information, or to make an appointment at Eugene Hearing & Speech Center, call (541) 485-8521 or visit www.eugenehearingspeech.org.

A private, nonprofit community agency, Eugene Hearing & Speech Center provides the highest-quality evaluation, treatment, education and advocacy for individuals with communication disorders. For more than 50 years, the Center has been the leading provider of hearing and speech services in our community, serving all ages, races, abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

#