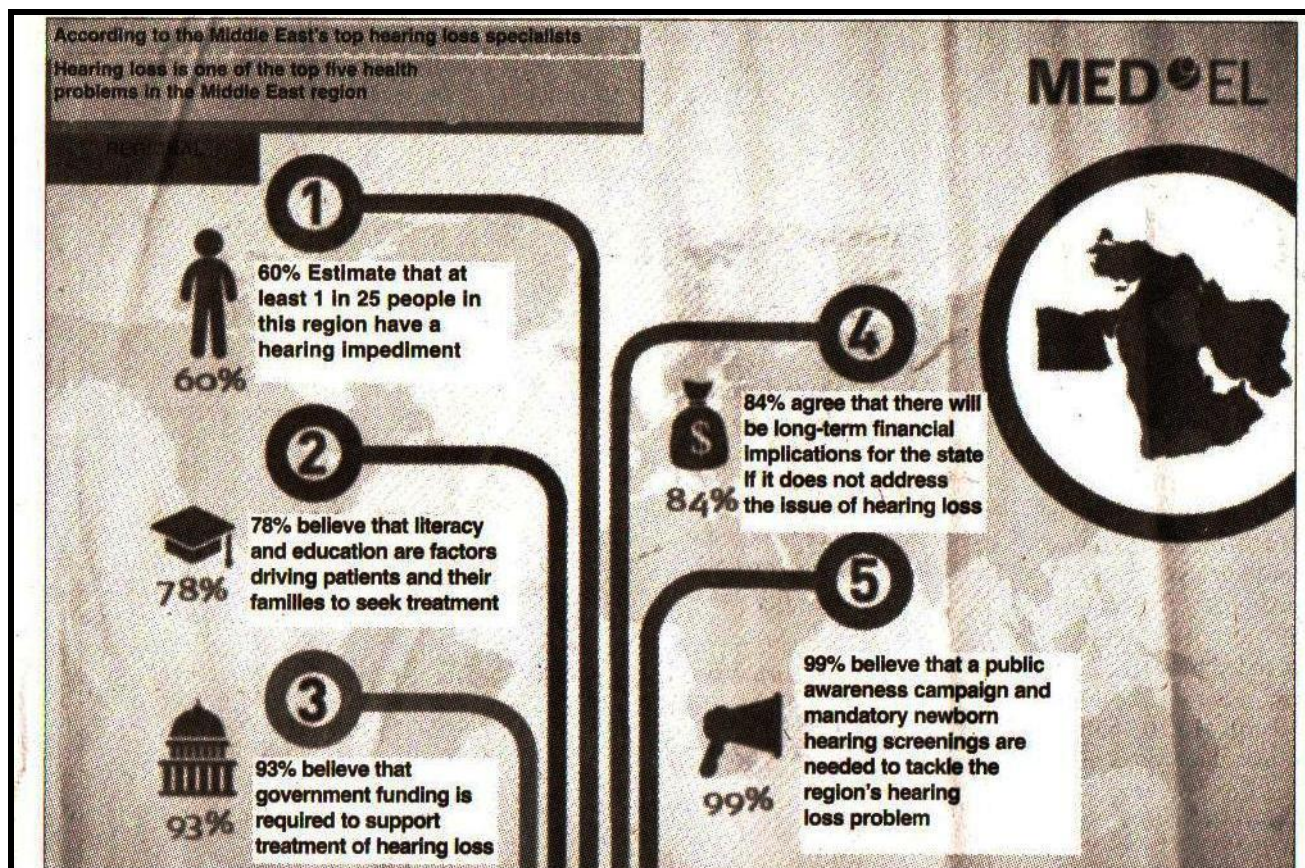


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Deafness affects millions in ME

THE lack of research on hearing loss and impairment and the need to raise awareness of the problem this serious was raised recently in a discussion of the development of hearing care in Egypt.

Over 13.6 million Egyptians and Arabs are facing this problem. There is a lack of health education on how to detect and prevent hearing loss, especially among young children. By increasing public awareness, educating families on early detection, and providing financial support for treatment, there is hope of overcoming the disease.

Awareness campaigns play an important role in educating the public on preventive measures and 78 per cent of the Middle East public believe that literacy and education are factors driving patients and

their families to seek treatment.

Hearing loss specialists predict that 1 in 25 people in the Middle East are affected by hearing loss.

Dr Mohamed el Shazli, an ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeon, emphasised the importance of implementing a mandatory newborn screening system to detect any issues at birth.

"Currently a large percentage of parents of affected children seek treatment only when their child is three years old. This is normally when the developmental issues associated with the disease start to clearly manifest themselves. But if all children in the region were screened at birth, and treatment commenced before the child was one, these developmental issues (no or limited speech, learning difficulties and more) can be mitigat-

ed," he said. Treatment to overcome hearing loss takes time; the first step is to treat the physical problem, and this can be done through various techniques; one such is the insertion of a cochlear ear implant.

The second step, the process of helping a child or adult re-learn how to interpret sounds and turn them into language takes time and continuous effort from specialists, such as doctors, audiologists and speech therapists.

The cost of this treatment can sometimes prove too much for families, and this leads to a number of patients not completing their treatment. Through more widely available government and charitable funding, more people throughout the region would be able to look for and complete their treatment.