

Alan Franey  
3550 West 14<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6R 2W4

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Colin Hansen  
Minister of Health  
Government of B.C.  
1515 Blanshard Street  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8W 3C8

**Re: Cochlear Implants**

Dear Minister Hansen,

I am writing you today in regards to what seems to be a growing frustration amongst parents seeking cochlear implants for their children. Our 11 year-old son Evan, was born profoundly deaf, but did receive an implant at B.C. Children's Hospital in 1994. The results for Evan and our family have been tremendously positive. Evan is now attending our local elementary school, where he is happy, well adjusted and achieving excellent grades. The interventions and special (i.e. costly) services required for him are now thankfully minimal.

It is greatly disturbing for my wife and I to hear time and time again from other parents with younger deafened children that they are not able to take advantage of cochlear implants in as timely a fashion as were we. This is distressing morally and as taxpayers. The cost of inaction or late action for these children and their families, and later to society, is in our view, extremely serious and unacceptable.

We are well aware of the controversy surrounding cochlear implants and must not forget the needs of those children who cannot benefit from this technological advancement. However, that being said, the fact remains that the tide of acceptance has turned and that parents of the most seriously deafened children will seldom now be dissuaded when seeking answers from doctors, audiologists, educators of the deaf, and parents who have first hand experience with implants.

For children born severely or profoundly deaf *and implanted at an early enough age*, a reported 90% are now able to regain 90% of their functional hearing (i.e.

implants are designed specifically to optimize the acquisition of spoken language). I hope I need not labour how significant and life-affirming an intervention this is. Instead, I would like to suggest that the current limits on the number of pediatric cochlear implants in this province is evidence of seriously impaired long term financial planning.

Recognizing that the limits on what our health system can *provide* is to do with what we can *afford*, I believe that is imperative to take a long term view of the cost benefits of cochlear implants. Our son no longer requires a special school, nor does he require a state provided sign language interpreter, nor *will* he for the rest of his life. We have every reason to believe that the most significant obstacle to his being a literate, tax paying, fully employed participant in mainstream society has been overcome with one relatively inexpensive medical intervention.

As a parent of a child with a cochlear implant, it is extremely hard to understand what sort of thinking is behind the impoverished and impoverishing resources so inadequately being made available to deaf children in British Columbia today. The number of implants currently funded by your Ministry is not in keeping with the present need, the times, other provinces, or long-term thinking. Society will pay a heavy price for this in the end.

I urge you to investigate this matter more fully and to consider the evidence (please find attached, for example, one recently published study from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore). I urge you to listen to the recommendations of your own experts in the field and to the increasingly distressed appeals of concerned parents. How would we look back on a government that was unwilling to supply eye-glasses or wheel chairs to children, if only government could? Perhaps the current appalling lack of supply of "hearing aids" to needy children will one day soon be seen as a fair analogy, and quite as wasteful.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Franey

cc: Rebecca Harvey, Ministry of Health  
Sharon Tooley & Sandra Bressler, B.C. Children's Hospital