

Draft media release Wednesday 11 July 2001

BREAKTHROUGH AIDS PROFOUNDLY DEAF

Visiting US audiological expert, Dr Donald Schum has announced a major new breakthrough in hearing research. Speaking at the New Zealand Audiological Conference in Christchurch, Dr Schum revealed the world's first digital 'Super Power' hearing aids for people who are severely or profoundly deaf. In New Zealand, this can affect more than a quarter of our 100,000 hearing aid users.

"Since Oticon launched the world's first digital hearing aids six years ago, we've been looking forward to the next dramatic breakthrough in hearing research," said Dr Schum, Vice-President of Audiology for Oticon USA. "This research has changed the way we view damage to the ear's fine hair cells. Sound Perception Management Software, used by audiologists to fit and fine-tune each individual's hearing aid, has been designed on the assumption that there is significant variation from person to person. This may sound simple, but traditional methods fit people to a median and then fine tune away from that to match each patient."

The unique 'Super Power' research project has been clinically trialled in both Denmark and the USA. New Zealand trials are about to start and will be conducted by Oticon NZ Ltd. "We expect the results to replicate those in the US, where users reported fundamental shifts in the quality of their lives as the world of hearing was able to be accessed," said Dr Schum. Oticon NZ Ltd expects to have the DigiFocus II 'Super Power' available commercially later this year.

"People who are severely or profoundly deaf are well-educated about their hearing loss – they have to be," said Dr Schum. "But they have tended to stick with traditional, analogue forms of hearing aids due to the difficulty in increasing power while meeting their individual needs. Now, exposed to the benefits of digital sound with the world's first 'Super Power' hearing aids, these users are very excited about the power, reliability and compatibility with other electronic devices such as mobile phones."

Dr Schum has a wealth of experience in the field of hearing aids and hearing aid technology. He has published widely on a variety of topics including hearing aid performance in noise, hearing aid fitting to special populations and advanced hearing aid technology.

The New Zealand Audiological Society, 25th Annual Conference, *'Future Directions in Audiology'* is from 11th —14th July 2001, Hotel Grand Chancellor, Christchurch.

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