



## **Development of Audiology Services in Malawi: Highlights and Challenges**

**Bhavisha Parmar**

*Special Advisor (Audiology)- Sound Seekers  
Lead Paediatric Audiologist, NHS  
PhD student- UCL Ear Institute*

[bhavisha@sound-seekers.org.uk](mailto:bhavisha@sound-seekers.org.uk)

# Who we are

Sound Seekers is a small and unique charity based in London dedicated to helping people with hearing loss in some of the poorest communities in Africa.



**Our vision is a world where no one is disadvantaged by hearing loss.**

# Where we work



- Cameroon
- The Gambia
- Malawi
- Sierra Leone
- Zambia

# What we do

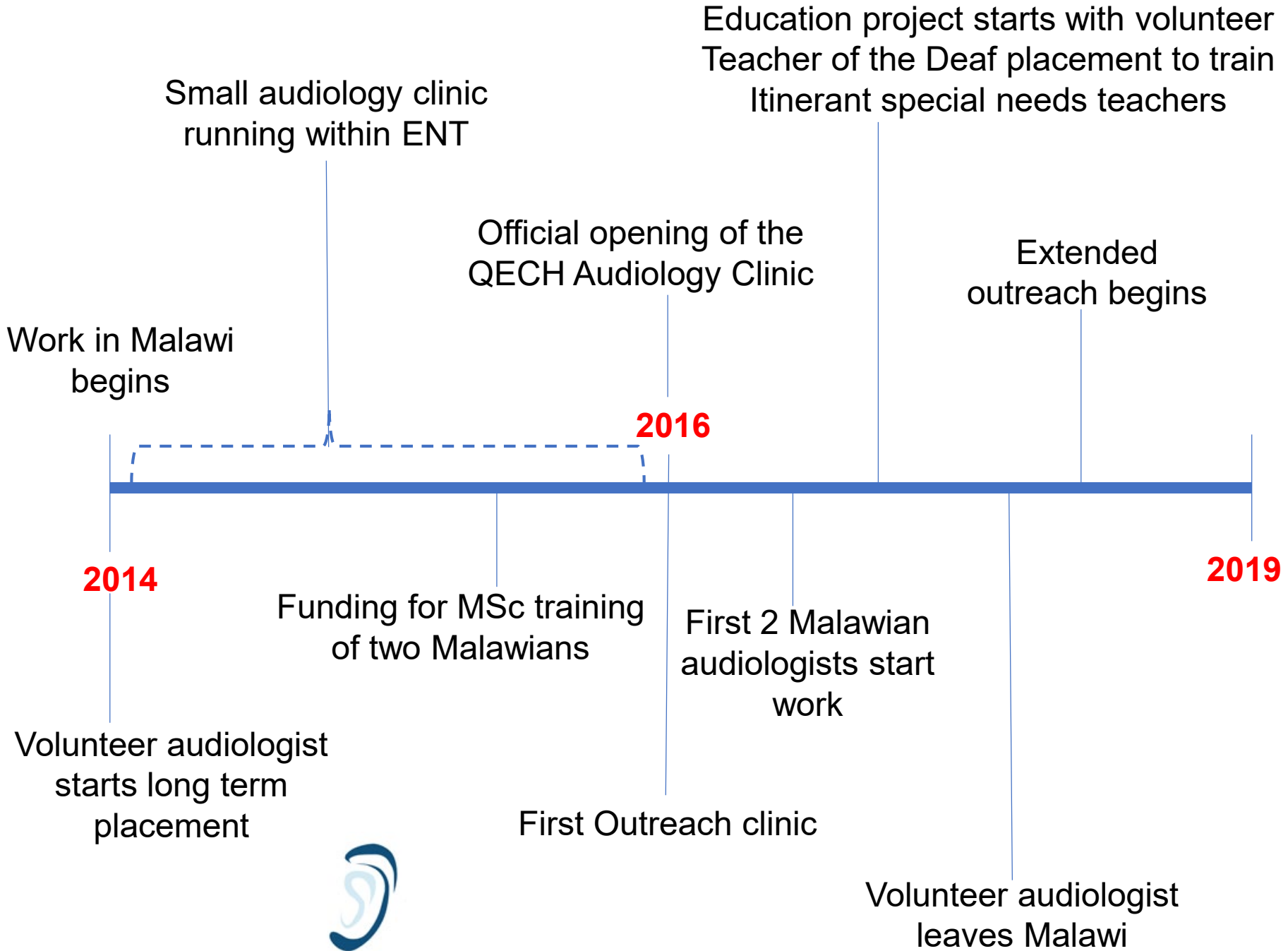
Sound Seekers are committed to helping people with hearing loss to realise their rights by gaining access to an integrated and comprehensive *Audiology, Community and Education (ACE)* programme that is sustained by national governments.

## Our values

- Forging partnerships
- Supporting education
- Sharing skills
- Advocacy
- Working holistically

- Population: 18 million
- 2 comprehensive audiology clinics with outreach services
- 2 ENT surgeons
- 11 cochlear implantees
- Audiology as a profession established within Medical Council of Malawi





# QECH Audiology clinic staff

- 2 Audiologists
- 1 ENT clinical officer/Audiology officer
- 2 Audiology Officers (Diploma in Audiology and Public Health Otology – University of Nairobi)
- 2 Audiology Technicians (Hearing Instrument Specialist certificate – Starkey Hearing Institute)
- 1 Clinic Manager
- 1 data entry personnel
- 1 driver/ear mould technician



# Services available at QECH audiology clinic

- **Diagnostics audiology:**
  - Behavioural assessment including visual reinforcement audiometry
  - Tympanometry
  - Otoacoustic Emissions
  - Auditory brainstem testing (ABR)
  - Auditory steady state response test (ASSR)
  - Targeted newborn hearing screening
  - Vestibular assessment and rehab (particularly BPPV)
- **Interventions**
  - Treatment for middle ear infections
  - Removal of wax and foreign bodies
  - Digital hearing aid fitting
  - Custom ear mould production
  - Referrals to special education and sign language
  - Outreach services



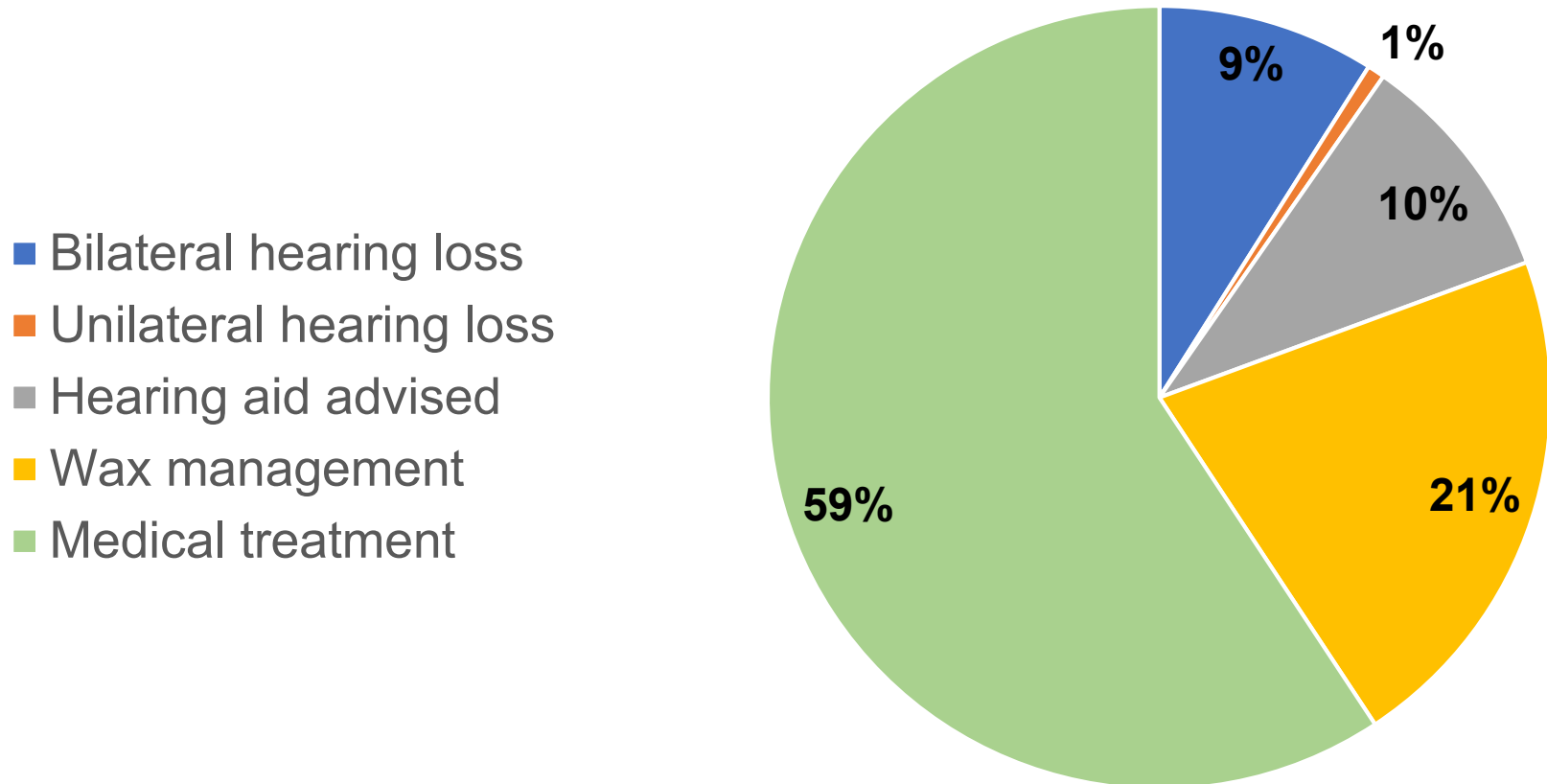
# Services available at QECH audiology clinic

- Diagnostics audiology:
  - Behavioural assessment including visual reinforcement audiometry
  - Tympanometry
  - Otoacoustic Emissions
  - **Auditory brainstem testing (ABR)**
  - **Auditory steady state response test (ASSR)**
  - **Targeted newborn hearing screening**
  - Vestibular assessment and rehab (particularly BPPV)
- Interventions
  - Treatment for middle ear infections
  - Removal of wax and foreign bodies
  - Digital hearing aid fitting
  - Custom ear mould production
  - Referrals to special education and sign language
  - **Outreach services**

# Clinical data



## Jan – October 2018 outreach events



**Total patients seen: 5470**

# Newborn screening (targeted screening)

- AABR screening for under weight (under 2kg) babies
- On the date of discharge they are referred to audiology for hearing screening

## **Main Challenges:**

- Equipment
- Patients lost to follow up
- One referral source
- Limited numbers in attendance (28 so far in 2018)
- If child does not pass screening then child is seen for follow up at 3 months for possible natural sleep electrophysiological testing and subsequent behavioural
- Youngest fitted with hearing aids 2 years despite introducing screening due to difficulty confirming threshold and making ear moulds for very small babies

# From the staff at QECH Audiology

## Overall challenges:

- Electrophysiological testing: interference, cost of consumables, training of staff, number needing sedation
- Having the option of electrophysiological tests sometimes means less effort is given to behavioural testing attempts
- Lack of speech therapy services
- **Hearing aid patients not coming back to clinic for review (no contact numbers)**
- Many areas in Malawi do not have access to Ear and Hearing Care services

# From the staff at QECH Audiology

## Overall successes:

- Malawian audiologists employed in the clinic
- Efficient admin and data recording processes in place
- Clinical protocols
- Outreach activities to reach more people
- Follow ups for the cochlear implant programme
- Research opportunities (Malaria/Meningitis study)
- Ear and hearing care awareness sessions at local churches and schools (seeing thousands of people turn up!)
- Learning new skills and troubleshooting issues
- This centre can be a training ground for new staff to help build capacity

# Acknowledgements



## **QECH audiology team:**

Mwanaisha Phiri  
Chikondi Chabaluka  
Kent Kaonga  
Louis Jailos  
Samson Mponda  
Miriam Ntambo  
Regina Kachapira  
Robert Lapken  
Prisca Kalinde  
Wagomezgeka Chirwa  
Caroline Clarke

## **Sound Seekers team:**

Kavita Prasad  
Meera Rajasooriar  
Nicole D'Angelo  
Bumni Akinwale



Dr Courtney Caron

Thank you for listening!

**[Bhavisha@sound-seekers.org.uk](mailto:Bhavisha@sound-seekers.org.uk)**