

# Access to work

**After suffering with a chronic ear condition that affected her hearing, RCN member and practice nurse Emma Brennan didn't know there was funding available to help her continue to do her job**

My hearing has been fluctuating for many years due to suffering from chronic glue ear. I have had numerous operations trying to help and alleviate the symptoms, the last one being bilateral grommets again. However, over the years my hearing has deteriorated and in the last few months it has become more noticeable as I have been unable to hear fully with my stethoscope.

As a practice nurse this is a big part of my job when assessing patients for various chest complaints. Staying within my limitations and knowing that my hearing has deteriorated, I had to start asking my colleagues to complete that part of the assessment for me.

## Getting help

I asked my audiologist and ear, nose and throat (ENT) consultant whether anyone else had the same problem and they suggested I may benefit from an electronic stethoscope. I contacted a company that makes them direct to see if they could assist me. They recommended a trial of the product and the difference to my hearing was phenomenal. Now I had the task of sourcing how I could get one. They

cost around £270, but I felt guilty asking my employers to support me when the Government is cutting funding to GP surgeries.

## Support with funding

As a member of the RCN, I contacted the RCN Foundation for some advice. They told me that this may be something that could be funded by a government scheme called Access to Work (AtW). Initially, I thought you had to be registered disabled and in receipt of disability living allowance or personal independence allowance, but it is a fund for people like me who have an impairment to help fund equipment that will aid them in their job.

After contacting an AtW adviser through the Government website, I explained my situation and they built a case for me. I was approved for the scheme and had the funds to get my new stethoscope. The whole process was very quick and easy and was done mostly over emails as, working in a surgery, it's very difficult to take calls.

The difference the stethoscope has made to my practice has been amazing;



I have now regained my confidence diagnosing chest conditions. I just wish I had researched electronic stethoscopes a lot sooner rather than struggling along not wanting to be a bother to anyone.

My advice for anyone struggling with impairments, whether hearing loss, sight loss or mobility issues is to always ask for help. Your impairment is important and help is available to help assist you with your work.