

**MEDIA RELEASE

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**Hearing tests for Deafness Awareness Month**

This week, a new cell phone application that can be used to test hearing loss made it possible for learners at Leeuwfontein Laerskool in Roodeplaat outside Pretoria to find out free of charge whether anything was amiss with their hearing. This action was part of the annual Deafness Awareness Month held in September.

Prof De Wet Swanepoel, an audiologist in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology at the University of Pretoria, was the developer of the hearScreen-application, which can convert any android cell phone to an apparatus for testing hearing.

With this application, hearing tests that are comparable to those carried out by audiologists in medical institutions can now be done by simply holding a cell phone to your ear. The test, which can be carried out by someone without any knowledge of audiology, can be completed in less than a minute, after which the results are uploaded onto a server. The results are combined with information about the place where the test was carried out and are then made available to health workers.

According to Prof Swanepoel, approximately 3,2 million South Africans, among them many children, suffer from inhibiting hearing loss. He estimates that as many as one in every ten children at school experiences hearing problems.He believes that early detection of hearing problems is the key factor in the treatment of this problem. Hearing problems can be the cause of poor academic achievement, a lack of energy, stress and a poor self-image.

More than 5 000 children and adults in and around Tshwane have already been tested by means of the hearScreen application and, thanks to the assistance of local NGOs, many more will be tested in the months ahead.

Prof Swanepoel’s patented discovery has already earned him several local and international awards and is currently a finalist in the African Entrepreneurship Competition.

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