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**ABSTRACT
BOOK**

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[Abstract:0206]

Challenges in verbotonal hearing therapy of pediatric and adult cochlear implant users during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The coronavirus pandemic has caught the whole world by surprise, and there is almost no profession in which the repercussions of the pandemic and the so-called “new normal” have not been felt. The profession of speech and hearing therapy was exposed to challenges and conditions to which it had to adapt on the fly. Cochlear implant users depend on the process of fitting their sound processor which is done face to face as well as live aural therapy. Verbotonal hearing therapy is part of the verbotonal method of speech and hearing therapy that requires the patient to be actively involved and present in the same space with the therapist. During the lock down phase of the pandemic, SUVAG Polyclinic’s Center for Cochlear Implants selected an online space for its patients and transferred as much therapy online as it was possible. Discord was the platform used by the Center for Cochlear Implants. It is a well known social platform used for messaging, voice and video calls and for the exchange of media and files in private chats and servers, especially in the gaming community. It is completely free to use and the interface is very much user friendly so our patients haven’t had difficulties in setting up their profile.

By using Discord we ensured rehabilitation continuity and gave our patients the best possible treatment during the ban of all non-urgent health care services. After the pandemic a questionnaire was presented to our patients and to the parents of our younger patients to evaluate their satisfaction with the service our Center provided. The outcome was a high satisfaction rate among our patients with the provided service. Many of the patients are not residents of Zagreb which made them concerned how are they going to participate in therapy due to the closed borders between counties. This online platform made it possible. Given the results of our survey and experience with online based hearing therapy it is safe to say that a fortunate outcome of the pandemic was tele-therapy that became a part of our daily practice. That being said, it is important to note that no amount of tele-therapy will ever provide the result face to face therapy provides.

Keywords: teletherapy, verbotonal method, cochlear implants, covid-19, Discord