**Hearing Screening Partnership Program**

**Background**

In the United States, approximately two to three infants in 1,000 are born with permanent hearing deficits. While hearing screening of newborns has become the standard of care in the United States, in the State of Maryland only 43% of infants who fail this screening receive diagnostic evaluations by the recommended 3-month timeline. To increase this percentage, the Maryland Early Infant Hearing Program (Maryland EHDI) together with a University of Maryland School of Nursing (UM SON) Doctor of Nursing Practice student created a pilot program in a large WIC Clinic offering hearing testing to infants/children in conjunction with scheduled appointments.

**Intervention**

This program created an interdisciplinary partnership between the University of Maryland Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences (UMD), the UM SON, Maryland WIC, and Maryland EHDI. UMD Hearing and Speech Sciences students were used to perform on-site hearing testing at a designated Maryland WIC clinic in November/December 2017. Parents were encouraged by WIC staff to drop in for hearing testing during their regularly scheduled WIC appointments. Education of staff was performed prior to the intervention to ensure staff understanding and buy-in. Infant names were checked in the Maryland state database prior to testing to evaluate prior hearing status and determine risk factors. Hearing testing was offered to the following categories of infants/children: any infant who missed/failed initial hearing screening or hearing re-screening, infants with one or more risk factors for hearing loss, infants with unknown hearing status, or any infant/child whose parent was concerned for their hearing status.

**Results**

During the six 3-hour sessions conducted at the WIC clinic, a total of 136 infant/child appointments occurred. Of the 136 appointments, 39 infants/children presented to researchers for evaluation of hearing testing needs. Of the 39 participants evaluated in the Maryland database, 24 were determined to need hearing testing by the UMD students. Of the 24 tested, 20 passed their testing and required no further follow-up, two infants had pass results but required further monitoring due to risk factors, and two infants failed and parents were informed about the need for immediate follow-up testing. Analysis of the original 39 infants/children evaluated for hearing testing needs revealed a high proportion of children outside of the target age group of <3 months, suggesting either a lack of these infants at this WIC site or a low rate of participation for this group. Due to the location of the WIC clinic, a large proportion of the participants were born in Washington DC and not included in the Maryland database.

**Conclusion**

The results of this pilot program support the use of an interdisciplinary partnership to implement a hearing testing program at WIC clinics. During this pilot, UMD students were able to successfully conduct on-site hearing testing and provide education to a large volume of WIC participants. Due fact that WIC participants are high risk for late hearing follow-up, these sites are ideal locations to target for future interventions. Meetings with each of the interdisciplinary partners have been conducted with the goal to continue these screenings in Spring 2018 and consider expansion to other WIC sites.