

Risk of self-injury by patients using video otoendoscopes aimed at home market

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March 07, 2024

Abstract

Sir, We have recently become aware of new small (2.2mm to 5.5mm) ear wax removal endoscopes (similar to otoendoscopes) aimed at the home market (See Figure 1). These are powered by USB attachments and can be viewed on mobile phones or home PCs. They are targeted at the home market for examination of ears, nose, and mouths and even some sellers advocate using their use on pets too. They often come with attachments to allow ear cleaning of wax and removal of foreign bodies etc. These are available on various online seller websites and can cost as little as £11. These have been available for purchase for a few years, but we were not aware of them until we started having some patients attend our emergency ENT clinic recently having damaged their ear canals with them during use. In one case, a child presented with extensive abrasions/laceration of the ear canal after her mother attempted to clean wax from the child's ears. Similarly, looking at the customer reviews on these online seller websites, other buyers have reported harm using these devices i.e. bleeding from the ear, pushing ear wax further in the ear canal and resulting in hearing loss 1,2. Having purchased one of these items for home research, we found the otoendoscope unwieldy and it was difficult to gain a good image. Also with mono-ocular vision, there is no depth perception, consequently this may increase the risk of self-injury for new/untrained users. Whilst such devices may well be helpful in the current COVID crisis and could be used for telemedicine to help with distant patient examination during lockdowns 3,4, we would like to highlight the potential dangers of the use of these items by the public.

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