



# Hearing loss a double whammy

By BEN EYLES

THE invisible disability - hearing impairment - does more damage than you'd think to Australian relationships.

A new study has found that loss of hearing significantly impacts on the relationships of senior Australians - 94 per cent of spouses responded that they feel the effects.

A study of more than 100 older couples that began in 2004 has reinforced the need for speech pathologists to work closely with both the hearing impaired partner and their unimpaired spouse, according to University of Queensland speech pathology lecturer Nerina Scarinci.

"The study found hearing impairment can impact on issues such as the way couples communicate, their physical intimacy and social activities, and can lead to feelings of frustration," Ms Scarinci said.

"In light of our ageing popula-

tion, speech pathologists will play a growing and important role in providing both partners with the skills to communicate more effectively with each other," she said.

The study found older women coped worse with their partner's hearing impairment.

"This is perhaps because women tend to place more emphasis on communication," Ms Scarinci said.

"Hearing impairment is an invisible disability, where people are often misinterpreted as being impolite or uninterested. Symptoms of a hearing problem include asking for repeats of what was said, misinterpretation of a conversation or 'switching off' during a conversation in a social situation."

Ms Scarinci said 60 to 70 per cent of Australians older than 65 would experience hearing trouble.

"Another common complaint from couples is arguing over television volume," Ms Scarinci

added.

Crown Gardens diversional therapist Liz Rullis said that once people lost their ability to communicate, they could quickly become isolated.

All information shared through the aged-care facility, from the activities schedule to the dinner menu, is relayed to residents in writing and over the PA.

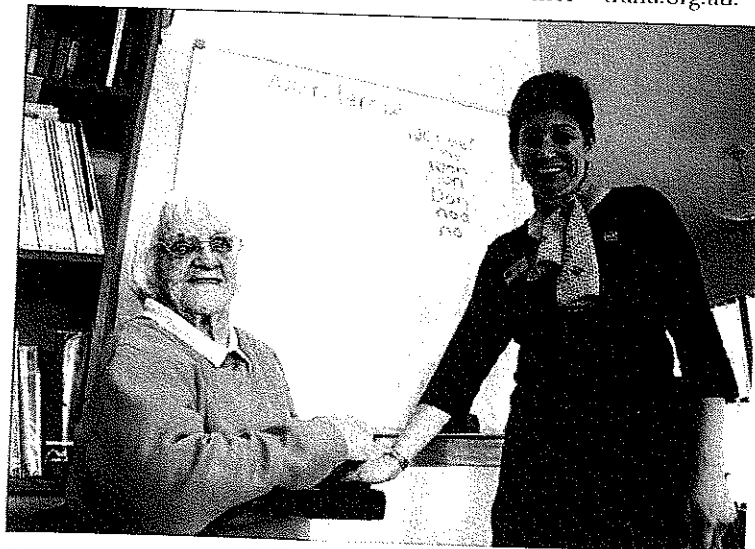
That way, those with hearing difficulties and those with declining vision both get the message. For those who struggle to both see and hear, Ms Rullis said staff physically act as they interact with residents.

"You use all modes of communication," Ms Rullis said.

"You simplify things so that people can stay connected.

"It's very important that staff are patient with residents, to reduce isolation issues," Ms Rullis said.

For more information, please visit [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au).



HEARING HELP: Crown Gardens diversional therapist Liz Rullis works with resident Margaret McGranahan, who needs help communicating.