



Disphony of Call-Center Operators

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Editorial

Qualitative and quantitative changes in the voice very frequently affect call-centre operators: prolonged and animated conversations, in a noisy environment, jointly demand constant use and forcing of the voice. Call centers employ large numbers of staff in a fast-growing field in both Europe (300,000 in the approximately 3000 centers in France, 250,000 operators in Italy) and in the United States. Workers in these centers are often subjected to strong environmental constraints such as noise, static work, small work station, lack of sight outside with little light, overall unsuitable working environment, the high workload, lack of autonomy, surveillance, aggressiveness of the user, irregular hours, etc. To prevent these attacks on health, the employer must take steps to ensure a state of well-being to his employee. These measures include both the overall organization and the working environment.

A call centre typically stands out in: Consumers front line, consumers not front line, Business, staff.

The staff is the group with the least vocal load. The business represents the group that contacts the largest customers with dedicated offers. The consumers section is instead aimed at individuals and in particular the front line is the "counter" service, which must provide anyone who phones the least expected and the most comprehensive possible answers (customer satisfaction). Phone operators are divided into "inbound" (i.e. those who receive phone calls from customers, such as operators of a toll-free number) and "outbound" (operators who call us at home). The customer service task requires a prolonged use of the voice the continuous conversation with the customer. In most cases, the work phases involve an alternation of interviews with the customer with consultation or data entry activities.

Some particular environmental situations can make vocal engagement particularly critical: Excessive ambient noise levels with difficulty in listening to callers, Discreet presence of disturbances due to the need to speak continuously aloud rather loudly, Microclimate problems mainly related to quality and air change, Problems with the headphones are concerned with the excessive intensity of sound entering the headset, Unlike the industrial context, background noise in the call center has a dominant vocal component.

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The accumulation of a multiplicity of contemporary conversations, if not controlled, is able to disturb the necessary concentration by making it more difficult to listen in headphones, and as such is a sure stress factor.

It then forces you to raise your voice contributing to vocal fatigue (in an obvious vicious circle) and/or to turn up the volume of the headphones causing hearing fatigue. There is excessive voice load (with an average of about 6 h per day of work) without taking voice breaks (41%) and without the use of any sound amplification system (100%).

The voice is for call-centre operators and many other workers certainly the main tool of work.

It is necessary to consider the symphony as a professional risk, which provides for the possibility of inserting preventive interventions aimed at solving or limiting the problem. The reduction of environmental sound interference, the use of amplification systems, and the need for voice breaks if necessary coded by law, increased health surveillance, better take charge of the disphonic can be valid tools in this area. Occupational medicine is therefore also of fundamental importance in the area of prevention. It is desirable to collaborate with the specialist O.R.L.-Phoniatrist. Finally, we need to review the table of vocal pathology with a better medical-legal and insurance framing. A voice disorder can have a significant impact on an individual's professional and social life; equally affects the psyche, physical, emotional capacity and communication.