

The joy of sound - in both ears



Jo Casamento , September 12, 2010

IN WHAT his doctor has described as an "absolute miracle", the musician and children's television presenter Don Spencer has regained the hearing in his left ear after 20 years.

The former Play School performer, whose daughter Danielle is married to Russell Crowe, stunned ear, nose and throat specialist Phillip Chang, who told him it just "isn't possible".

Spencer lost hearing in the ear after bursting an eardrum mid-flight and then contracting an infection in it.

"They [doctors] said there was no point operating further, no point putting in a hearing aid and there was zero I could do," said Spencer, who was awarded an OAM in 2007.

"As a singer and songwriter it was really difficult to come to terms with. I felt like I'd lost surround sound, and singing harmonies became tricky. I had to make sure people always stood on the right of me. It was very strange – it was like there was a brick wall in front of you."

A couple of months ago Spencer was on another flight when he felt excruciating pain "like a six-inch knife was going through my head".

He saw Dr Chang and was told he had made a mess of his right ear but the left eardrum was OK. Dr Chang said he would put a grommet in the ear so he could fly without trouble. It was then that Spencer began hearing things with his left ear. Initially his doctor did not believe him, but a test showed he had regained 27 per cent hearing in the ear.

"He was like 'I don't know what's going on – this is just not possible – I have no idea how you are hearing things now, everything was destroyed in that ear,' " Spencer said.

It was during the grommet operation that Dr Chang decided to inject a steroid into the left ear.

Ten days later 50 per cent hearing had returned. "He said 'Don, this is a miracle, it's just not possible. I'm dumbfounded and I need to write a medical paper on this'."

For Spencer, who flew last week without damaging anything, the feeling is amazing. "I don't have to read lips any more," he said.