



FRANCIS SLABBER, JANET STEER & ASSOCIATES

PROFESSIONAL CARE FOR ALL YOUR HEARING PROBLEMS

THE HEARING CLINIC

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Newsletter Spring 2009

Audiology Abroad

The Ida Institute in Denmark is a foundation dedicated to research into all matters audiological. In May Francis attended their 3 day workshop which focused on developing tools/strategies to improve professional patient interactions and to better understand individual patient needs.

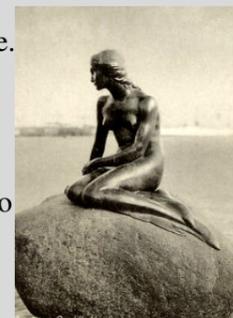
One of the issues worked through was to consider the question "Can one assume that somebody coming for a hearing test for the first time is ready to be there and to "hear" the results of the tests?" More often than not, this is not the case. Many people resent coming and have been forced by family/friends to seek help. Many are aware of their problem but underestimate its extent or impact on relationships and interaction. It's common for us to hear "I'm not that deaf" or "I think I can cope" or "I'll do something when it gets worse". But just how bad is bad enough and when would you know that it is time to do something? The answer is that any loss is enough of a loss. Any impact that a loss of hearing might have on communication, be it at work, with friends or in conversation with your spouse around the house, is enough to justify further investigation. Whether any action is taken depends on where you are on your journey of accepting your disability and the effect or potential effect it has on your life and on others.

At some point during each person's journey something urges them to make an appointment for a hearing test. They've probably had too many arguments about who said what, their boss/staff have been making comments, they are turning up the TV and someone is complaining, they find themselves getting frustrated in social situations and are noticing anti-social behaviour on their own part.

From the moment you first start considering that your hearing is not what it should be, you will start on a journey which will most likely determine the success of whatever management course you eventually choose. On average it takes a person 7 years from when they first suspect a problem to actually looking for help. Often, if given poor or inappropriate advice, it could take many more years before they get another more accurate opinion.

The journey often starts by self-diagnosis: putting your finger in one ear and comparing it to the other. Then you start managing your hearing difficulty by avoiding certain people, places or situations. You notice other people's reactions to sound and gauge your own responses by theirs. You adapt your behaviour to hide your loss, like laughing at a joke without knowing the punch line or nodding away in conversation without hearing what is being said. You become frustrated by situations which often result in friction and misunderstandings. You start blaming others' speech rather than your lack of hearing and may even start questioning your mental awareness or ability to participate. You might try hearing aids and be dissatisfied, whether because of the choice of aid, lack of skill of the supplier or that you are just not ready, it becomes a good excuse not to try again until it's too late. And yes, it can be too late.

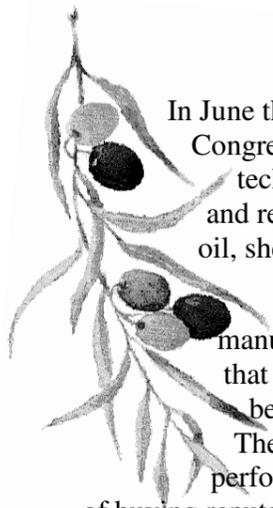
Through training courses such as these, we hope to understand better what individuals go through before they get to us. This way we can make appropriate recommendations for particular lives, needs and situations. Don't wait too long before getting help and make sure you get professional attention.



Please check the replacement value of your hearing aids annually and specify them on your all risks insurance for loss or damage!

Please bring your used hearing aid batteries back to us and we will send them for recycling!

More Foreign Flavours



In June the island of Tenerife was the venue for the Annual International Audiology Society Congress. Everything Audiology is discussed at these meetings, from the latest hearing aid technology, implantable devices and audiological diagnoses to the consequences of internet and retail based testing and sales. Francis attended and other than eating lots of garlic and olive oil, she also learnt a thing or two.

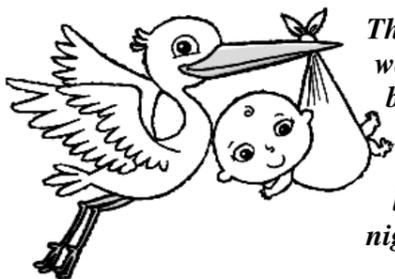
One topic discussed was “How can one prove that a hearing aid is doing what the manufacturer specifications predict?” We rely mostly on theory and patient report back trusting that patients can gauge when they are hearing comfortably, whereas internationally it has become the norm to do validation and verification testing involving specialized equipment. The equipment is not only hard to come by and expensive to acquire but tests are expensive to perform making it difficult to implement in South Africa. It highlights yet again the importance of buying reputable hearing aids from reputable suppliers and building a relationship with your clinician.

Another much talked about topic is that of hearing speech in noise. Manufacturers tend to put a lot of emphasis on a hearing aid’s ability to reduce background noise and amplify speech, but research is showing that the normal ear’s ability to do this is something that cannot be recreated. To decipher speech in a noisy environment, you need more than just hearing. You need mental resources, like being able to predict speech based on the context of the conversation and when you’ve misheard you need to be able to correct it yourself without further information. This requires active short term memory. Younger people tend to be able to repair backward while listening forward, in other words listen, hear and think at the same time! Older people tend to need to hear, then listen and then think before they can respond appropriately. In the fast-paced noisy world we live in today, this poses a challenge. Although some hearing aid technology can give you a fighting chance by controlling background noise, enhancing speech and automatically adjusting to the environment, it can’t slow things down to a pace that each individual (aging) brain can cope with – yet!

Audiology at Home

Locally our year has been very busy: giving talks, attending product launches, training seminars, ethics workshops and business seminars. We are also looking forward to our annual ENT and Audiology Congress which takes place in Cape Town in November. We feel that being well trained and keeping up with developments and research is an obligation we owe ourselves and our patients enabling us to give updated advice on market changes in products and treatment. This is why we will from time to time change or add to the products that we supply or recommend and advise on different tests or strategies.

Our administrative staff have been learning new tricks too. Karen, Krysia and Margi have all been trained to do basic hearing aid checks and repairs such as changing tubing and waxguards and assessing the aids for wax blockages and damage. This way there are more of us available to help when you pop in with an obstinate hearing aid. Krysia, who is getting married in October, has also been put in charge of all our marketing efforts, so she has been acquiring new skills on that front too.



This news might cause a few headaches not to mention morning sickness but were you to ask Francis how she is feeling at the moment, her answer would be “very pregnant”. Great News! Of course it will mean maternity leave during which many of you will have withdrawal symptoms and need trauma counselling – but SHE WILL BE BACK! We are employing a worthy locum from February to round-about May and other than some sleepless nights on our side nothing else will change and our hours will stay the same:

Wynberg	35 Waterloo Rd	Monday to Friday	8h30 - 17h00	021 - 797 7948
Tokai	Tokai Village	Tuesday & Thursday	8h30 - 16h30	021 - 715 5623
Claremont	19 Belvedere Rd	Monday & Wednesday	9h00 - 15h30	021 - 797 7948
Fish Hoek	Valyland Centre	Wednesday & Friday	8h30 - 16h30	021 - 782 3322

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