Editorial

Evaluating Tinnitus

During the past decade we have seen a virtual explosion of interest in tinnitus, especially in efforts to treat it. New approaches are yielding increasingly encouraging results. One of the serious problems highlighted by these advances has been the lack of reliable tools for measuring the various dimensions of tinnitus in the individual patient and for measuring how these dimensions are impacted by treatment. Of particular concern are tests for pitch matching, loudness matching, maskability, and residual inhibition. In spite of great interest and considerable effort, measures of these tinnitus dimensions still lack the level of standardization characterizing diagnostic tests of auditory function.

In this issue of JAAA, however, James Henry and his colleagues at the Portland, Oregon VA Medical Center present encouraging data on the reliability of an easily standardized, computer-automated procedure for quantifying one dimension of the tinnitus test battery, the matching of loudness. Of particular interest, in the present study was a comparison of two procedural variations 1) fixed or random start level, and 2) fixed or random step size. Both paradigms used a bracketing procedure to determine when the comparison tone was judged to be equal in loudness to the tinnitus. In the fixed procedure the start level was a fixed sensation level whose exact value was determined by the degree of hearing loss. In the random procedure, however, the start level was chosen at random within a defined range of sensation levels. Similarly, in the fixed procedure step size was predefined while in the random procedure step size was randomly chosen over a defined range.

The fact that these two procedural variations yielded equivalent results is important. It shows that the reliability of loudness matches made under the author's automated procedure can withstand significant procedural variation, an important consideration in achieving ultimate standardization.

The ultimate development of a standardized tinnitus test battery will be hastened by the kind of careful, painstaking research illustrated by this study.

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Editor-in-Chief

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