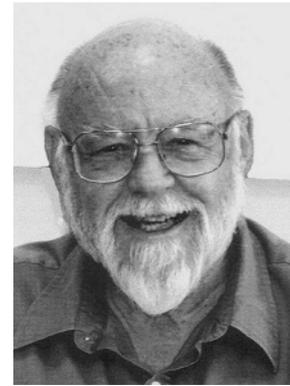


Editorial

Do Hearing Aids Really Improve Quality of Life?



Hearing aids can be a real challenge, especially for many elderly individuals. Their small size presents major problems for persons with arthritic fingers or with some loss of fine motor control. It is not always easy to change the battery, to manipulate the controls, and to take the aid in and out of the ear. Elderly persons frequently complain, moreover, that amplified sound is unnatural and often annoyingly loud, and they complain uniformly that talkers are difficult to understand in the presence of background competition. They will often insist that, much of the time, they get along better without the aids than with them.

It is not unreasonable to ask, therefore, whether hearing aids are actually a net advantage, especially for the geriatric population. Are we really helping them, or are we just compounding their problems in everyday living? Seeking answers to this important question, our Academy, under the leadership of then president Angela Loavenbruck, appointed a task force to conduct a meta-analysis of the existing literature on the link between hearing aids and quality of life in adults. Impressively named the “American Academy of Audiology Task Force on the Health-Related Quality of Life Benefits of Amplification in Adults,” the task force included Theresa H. Chisolm (Cochair), University of South Florida; Carole E. Johnson, Auburn University; Jeffrey L. Danhauer, University of California Santa Barbara; Loral J.P. Portz, University of South Florida; Harvey B. Abrams, Bay Pines VA Healthcare System; Sharon K. Lesner, University of Akron; Patricia A. McCarthy, Rush University Medical Center; and Craig W. Newman (Cochair), Cleveland Clinic.

In this issue of *JAAA*, we are pleased to present the final report of this unique undertaking. The task force faced a formidable challenge in evidence-based practice. They had to

sort through a plethora of databases, NIH and NSF grants, books, and dissertations in search of those few research studies meeting their necessarily rigid standards for inclusion in the meta-analysis. From 171 relevant abstracts turned up by the initial search they found just 16 papers meeting all inclusion criteria, but the meta-analysis based on these 16 papers led to an important conclusion. In this, the final report of the task force, the committee members agreed, on the basis of their systematic review with meta-analysis, that “hearing aid use improves adults’ health-related quality of life by reducing psychological, social, and emotional effects of sensorineural hearing loss, an insidious, potentially devastating chronic health condition if left unchecked.”

We all owe a great debt of gratitude to this task force for its painstaking efforts on this project. They have provided a firm cornerstone of support for the efficacy of our most important aural rehabilitative tool.

James Jerger
Editor-in-Chief