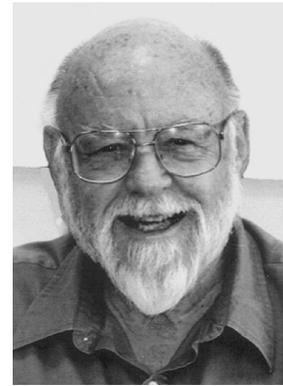


Editorial

Does Tinnitus Actually Affect Quality of Life?



Just after tinnitus maskers first became available, I had occasion to counsel an individual who insisted that his tinnitus was driving him mad. He pleaded that he was at the end of his rope and we had to do something for him. If the ringing didn't stop, he thought he might just have to end it all. I urged him to put such thoughts aside immediately. I assured him that help was on the way. I pointed out that we now had a very effective technique for countering the ringing, a small device called a "tinnitus masker." When coupled to the ear and turned on, I related, one hears a gentle sound, like waves on the beach, and the ringing sound is masked away. With that I inserted the device and turned it on. He listened for a moment; then his face broke out in a broad smile. Beaming, he agreed that the ringing was, indeed, gone. He was astonished. It was, he averred, as if he had been given a new life. I agreed that the effect was amazing and noted that the device cost only \$300. He hesitated, then replied that he would have to think about it.

Well, after that experience I have never been absolutely clear about the relation between tinnitus and the actual quality of life of the sufferer. In this issue of *JAAA*, however, authors David M. Nondahl, Karen J. Cruickshanks, Dayna S. Dalton, Barbara E.K. Klein, Ronald Klein, Carla R. Schubert, and Ted S. Tweed of the University of Wisconsin and Terry L. Wiley of Arizona State University report the results of a portion of the far-reaching Epidemiology of Hearing Loss Study, in which the impact of tinnitus on quality of life was exhaustively studied in 2800 elderly tinnitus sufferers. They asked how scores on the Medical Outcomes Study Short Form Health Survey varied with degree of tinnitus severity. Results showed a strikingly systematic decline in ten different dimensions of quality of life as degree of tinnitus varied from

none to severe. Interestingly, the strongest associations were in the domains involving physical pain and stress, rather than in the domains involving mental and emotional stress. The authors suggest that this might be related to the fact that psychosomatic complaints are common in tinnitus sufferers.

This study provides a wealth of data confirming the link between tinnitus and diminished quality of life, an important contribution to the theoretical framework underlying tinnitus intervention therapy.

James Jerger
Editor-in-Chief