



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

North Shore Branch

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Issue 68 March 2010

Mountain Ear

Diary of a Cochlear Implant

By: Flo Spratt

GIFT

Gift. Definition: something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation.

It has been now one year since I have had my surgery for a cochlear implant. I still marvel at the chorus of sounds around me. The range of sounds I am now able to hear is so much larger. For example, this morning as I sat outside our rental cottage in Maui, I could hear the lowing of a mourning dove, and the chirping, calling, whistling and chattering of several types of birds, all at the same time! Even when I was inside with the windows all shut, I could still hear the birds. What a wonderful gift this hearing is.

Gift. That is what my hearing is to me.

One of the most frequently asked questions I receive is, "Are you going to get a second cochlear implant?" That is a good question. After all, I have two ears. Having had two hearing aids for at least 35 years, I know the advantages of having two aids. In fact, I advocate buying two hearing aids, if it is within one's budget.

I asked my surgeon this question during our first appointment with him. His answer went something like this: "No, we are not able to give you two. We work within the budget given to us, and clearly it is better to give two people one cochlear implant than give one person two implants. We must live within our budget".

So why I am happy with one implant and not wishing I had two? First, I am hearing better than I ever have, even when I had two hearing aids! Now I can hear people speaking in the distance, on a PA system, on the phone, in the car, even my dentist with his mask on. My one implant has given me access to what "normal" hearing people hear.

Second, I was given a gift. To think about this renewed ability to hear and its close ties to our health care system's ability to give it to me is humbling.

While I have two reasons for not desiring a second implant, I have one response for the one that I have received. Thank you! Thanks to my surgeon, thanks to the government, thanks to the people of Canada, and especially, thanks to the Lord of heaven and earth.

April Presentation

Monday, April 19, 2010—7:00 PM

At the Summerhill

135 West 15th Street, North Vancouver

A North Shore Branch

Special Panel Presentation

Invite family members and friends

To come along and learn how

Hearing loss affects us all

Good news!

Another public facility on the North Shore has become more hearing accessible!

The West Vancouver Memorial Library's newly-opened Welsh Hall has an assistive listening system. This system will benefit persons who are hard of hearing wishing to participate in public or private meetings, lectures, and events held in the Welsh Hall. The system is an FM system and users will be loaned a portable receiver unit and either a neckloop or headphones.

If you are attending an event in the library and wish to use the system, please:

- ◆ Contact the library's Meeting Room desk at 604-925-7405 one week before the event you plan to attend in the Welsh Hall. This is necessary for the library to contact and ask any meeting organizers or speaker(s) if they would be willing to wear/use a microphone. Please understand that not all speakers may want to wear/use microphones, but we hope this will be a very rare occurrence.
- ◆ Go to the Meeting Room desk 15 minutes before the event. You will need to sign out the equipment at the desk.
- ◆ You will be loaned the portable receiver unit and given a choice of a neckloop or headphones. If you have a hearing aid containing a telecoil (T-switch), you will be able to use the neckloop. (Before you go to the library, it will be helpful to know if you have a telecoil/T-switch equipped on your hearing aid). If your hearing aid does not have a telecoil/T-switch or if you do not wear hearing aids, you will need to use the headphones. The library staff will show you how to turn on the unit and adjust the volume.

We hope many of you -- young and old -- will enjoy the lectures and classes that are offered in the Welsh Hall with the FM system. We encourage you to try it out and let the library know if it works for you.

While helping to test the FM system, a few of us recently were able to watch -- and hear clearly -- the TV broadcast of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games on the room's large TV screen. If you are interested in renting the Welsh Hall for a meeting, you can contact the library at 604-925-7405. Both

the Welsh Hall and Meeting Room desk are located on the lower level of the West Vancouver Memorial Library, 1950 Marine Drive, West Vancouver (website <http://www.westvanlibrary.ca/>). Check out the library's calendar for a list of upcoming events <http://www.westvanlibrary.ca/event/calendar.php>.

CHHA – North Shore Branch February Presentation

Approximately thirty CHHA members and members of the general public attended our February 15th evening presentation at the Summerhill. Our special guest speakers were audiologists from the West Vancouver office of Island Hearing. Mandy Fisch, M.Sc, Aud(C) and Jessica Slater, BA(Sp&H Th), Aud(C) spoke about "Your Hearing is Important -- How to Get the Most of Your Audiologist Visits". Also in attendance to answer questions were their colleagues Deborah Maloon, Aud(C) and Lori Worthen, Audiometric Technician. Our branch is very grateful that they accepted our request to speak on a night of numerous Vancouver 2010 Olympics events and festivities.

The following are just a few highlights from their information-packed presentation.

Mandy began by sharing some facts about the occurrence of hearing loss in the general population. (Don't think you are the only one with hearing problems!) It is often reported that 10% of the general population have some degree of hearing loss. Further breakdown by age group shows the percentage of occurrence per the following age groups: 5% between 18 and 44 years of age; 14% between 45 and 64; 54% over 65 years; and 65% for the over 85 years. Unfortunately, the percentages for the first two age categories are expected to rise due to the now common use of iPods and MP3 players.

Mandy also mentioned the professionals that are licensed to sell hearing aids in B.C. These are Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Specialists. While their academic qualifications differ somewhat, they are both licensed to dispense hearing aids. A person may also visit their physician for a referral to an E.N.T. (Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist) who can refer them to a hearing professional. Both Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Specialists will refer

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clients to their doctor if they suspect medical issues are involved in the hearing loss.

Patients with hearing loss report that:

- they are hearing but not understanding;
- they have difficult hearing in background noise;
- they frequently ask people to repeat;
- they prefer the TV or radio volume louder; and
- other people seem to mumble.

Left untreated, hearing loss results not only in communication problems, but may result in other negative effects such as:

- increased worry and anxiety in social situations
- decreased social activity
- increased feelings of depression and isolation
- increased frustration among family members

Next, Jessica outlined the steps involved in being diagnosed and treated by an audiologist:

1. **Hearing test and consultation:** The audiologist conducts a **case history** where your hearing concerns are discussed in detail. Then the audiologist will conduct an **otoscopic examination** to ensure there is no wax or debris in your ear. Next the audiologist will carry out a series of **hearing tests** in a soundproof booth.
2. **Test interpretation and discussion of technology:** After the tests, the audiologist will explain the **test results** to you in detail. The audiologist informs you of the **different styles of hearing aids and technologies** available as well as the costs involved. You and the audiologist will determine the best hearing aid device for your individual lifestyle and hearing needs. If needed, you would have **earmolds** made of your ears at this time. You will be given an **appointment** for the fitting of your hearing aids within 10-12 days.
3. **Hearing instrument fitting:** At this subsequent appointment, the audiologist will **program** your new hearing aids on a computer. Then with you

wearing the hearing aids, the audiologist will set the best starting volume based on your subjective feedback and also by objective testing. You will be **counselled** on how to use and care for your hearing aids. Then, you will be given **follow-up appointments** every two weeks until you are comfortable with the settings on the aids and maintenance. You will be granted a **90-day trial period** with the hearing aids. (Note: The duration of the trial period may vary depending on your own audiologist or hearing aid provider. Be sure to confirm this information.) If you decide to try a different model of hearing aid(s), a new trial period should commence.

During the trial period when you are testing out the hearing aids, issues will arise. Our guest audiologists had the following important advice:

- **Be patient!** It takes **3-6 months** for your brain to adapt to wearing hearing aids and to the new sounds you are exposed to on a daily basis.
- Attend your **follow-up appointments** regularly.
- Keep a **notepad or diary** handy to write down any concerns.
- Bear in mind that no **question** you have is a silly question.
- Come in for **regular clean and checks** of your aids.
- **Trust your instincts!** If you think your aids are not working properly, you are probably right. Bring your aid in for a service.

When you are selecting hearing aids, how do you know what you need in a hearing aid? The important thing for you to know is to identify the most specific listening needs you have. Pick the **top 5 situations** you wish to hear better in, then share and discuss this information with your audiologist. These days, there are many technologies available in different types of digital hearing aids, and your audiologist will be able to guide you through the choices. Remember, your relationship with your audiologist is long-term, so the relationship should be founded on trust and respect.

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The audience then asked questions of our guest audiologists. One audience member asked what is the maximum level that a hearing aid can be adjusted to. (When you and your audiologist first select and decide on a hearing aid model, the audiologist will recommend one that will allow for future additional adjustments to be made over the estimated life of your aid.) Another commented that electronic devices like cameras and body hearing aids used to be purchased and kept for life. (Nowadays, devices are replaced much more frequently. Deborah mentioned that manufacturers will not repair hearing aids that are older than five years.) Another question was what people can do to minimize ear wax, the number one enemy of hearing aids. (Every 2-3 months, place a drop or two of olive or vegetable oil in one's ears, and then place cotton batting. The next day, stand in the shower and position your head so that water from the shower sprays on your ear to promote the exit of wax from your ear canal. Deborah also strongly cautioned against undergoing ear candling. She reported that ear doctors have had to remove bits of candle wax which have adhered to the eardrums of patients who had undergone ear candling.) Another question was if hearing aids should be worn during an airplane ride if one experiences pressure in the ears. (It is recommended to chew gum and swallow. This technique will help reduce or eliminate pressure in the ears.) A final question was which manufacturers make hearing aids for low-tone or low-frequency hearing loss. (Manufacturers make digital hearing aids that can be used to treat either low-frequency or high-frequency losses; the same aid will be programmed differently by the audiologist.)

Thank you very much to Mandy Fisch, Jessica Slater, Deborah Maloon, and Lori Worthen of Island Hearing (West Vancouver branch) for their presentation on how to get the most out of visits to the audiologists. We hope that our guest speakers' presentation and advice will encourage more people to visit the hearing specialist of their choice to diagnose and treat any hearing problems for optimal physical and mental health.

CHHA—North Shore Branch gratefully acknowledges the support of the City and District of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver through their community grant programs.

Embracing the World of Sound with the New Technology

By Hugh Hetherington

In this article I want to deal with one of the most common types of hearing loss, namely, "high frequency" hearing loss. I feel confident in talking about this subject largely because I have been there. I am now in my early 70s, but I am sure that the beginning of my hearing loss dates back more than 40 years, perhaps more. The interesting thing is that I never really suspected that I even had a hearing loss until about 15 years ago, coincidentally about the time I became involved with CHHA. I suspect that my wife knew that I had problems hearing long before I recognized it, but she was kind enough not to mention it, at least not often. She just put up with me and repeated things when needed. I don't even think it was a case of denial on my part. If you don't know that you have a hearing loss it isn't something that you can deny.

I know that many people today are in the same boat. It is the most common type of hearing loss in the general population. Unless you have a hearing test, you just can't know the extent of the loss. There are many reasons why "high frequency" hearing loss is so prevalent. The first reason can just be attributed to the aging process. We have a name for it, presbycusis or age related hearing loss. In younger adults, other causes are excessive noise exposure including loud music or workplace and recreational noise. Another cause can even be traced to some prescription drugs.

I know I was tested many times during my working years but I was never advised that I was showing signs of hearing loss. This is quite possibly because in those days there really wasn't a truly satisfactory treatment for high frequency hearing loss. Hearing aids of the time didn't have the same selected high frequency amplification capability that modern digital hearing aids now have. Open custom ear molds could be used with some success, however, with too much high frequency boost, feedback often became a problem.

As they say, hindsight is 20/20 and looking back I can now describe all the symptoms. I think the most important symptom can be described as follows: You hear the words, but you can't always make complete

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sense of what you heard. Remember, we are talking about “high frequency” hearing loss here. You may need to turn the television louder but you still can’t understand everything that is said. Why is this? Many of the sounds that help with the intelligibility of speech have high frequency components. These are the soft sounds like “S”, “F”, “SH”, “CH”, or “T”. When these sounds are weakened or missing in the speech it becomes indistinct. It is also important to note, that in the early stages of high frequency hearing loss, our brain actually works harder to fill in the missing pieces. It does this with great success, but only up to a point. It starts to use visual clues, such as, what is visible on the lips. It also uses the convenient syntax of the English language that dictates that a certain sound should be there even if we don’t actually hear it. To give you an example of this, consider the conjugation of verbs in a sentence that changes depending upon whether the subject is singular or plural. When the subject is singular, the verb generally ends with an “s”, when plural the “s” is missing on the verb. For example, consider the singular “Birds fly” and the plural “The bird flies”. It is not usually something we think about, however, the brain picks up on this and also uses the context of what is being said to help fill in the blanks, albeit unconsciously. Unfortunately, it is not always perfect as we know and that is when problems occur.

Another difficulty that is often described concerns the difficulty in understanding women’s or children’s voices. Understanding speech in noisy environments also becomes more of a problem. Understanding someone speaking from across a room, from another room, outdoors or when more than one person is speaking are other symptoms. As the hearing loss progresses these symptoms become worse. Unfortunately, it is common to deny the problem for many years and there is a considerable downside to doing this. We get used to living in a somewhat muffled world. I use that term on purpose, because our world doesn’t necessarily get quieter, just what I would call acoustically blurred. Let’s compare it to putting on eyeglasses. When we do this our vision becomes noticeably sharp again. Treating high frequency hearing loss correctly and in a timely manner can help to restore our auditory acuity in the same manner. Our world becomes more alive. We hear the birds singing. Running water returns to a more normal sound. We hear our footsteps over pebbles. We hear the rus-

ting of leaves. And, believe it or not, speech actually becomes more intelligible.

I do, however, want to stress that the words “timely manner” are important key words here. If left too long, our brain gets used to this muffled world. When we try to restore it with hearing aids we can have difficulty adapting to those sounds that we haven’t heard distinctly for a long time. We can adapt though. With perseverance and the help of our audiologist the future can be much more alive. That means wearing our hearing aids all day, every day. It doesn’t work to just put them on when we think we will need them. We have to adapt and get used to living in a world of sound. To quote the old cliché; our hearing aids won’t do us any good sitting in a drawer.

Another point I want to make is that hearing aids are not the complete answer. We must remember that hearing takes place in our brain. The ears are only the mechanism that detects the sound and conducts it to the brain via the auditory nerve. Therefore, there is also a rehabilitation process that takes place over time. When a person has perfect hearing, the brain has adapted to all the sounds we normally hear in our environment. It knows which sounds are important and which sounds to ignore. It can ignore the loud ticking of a clock or the constant hum of the refrigerator. It can also blank out other sounds or voices that we don’t want to listen to, either consciously or unconsciously. However, it needs to be said that some people are obviously better at this than others. With hearing loss, gradually over time the brain has lost much of this ability. Once we begin to wear hearing aids, this process of re-learning to hear has to begin all over again as it once did from childhood.

Fortunately, hearing aid technology has made major advances over the last few years in hearing aids especially suited for treating “high frequency” hearing loss. These are generally called “open fit” hearing aids. They come in two types; “thin tube” and “receiver in the canal”. Both types give pretty much the same result and it is difficult to say that one type is better than the other. It largely depends upon the brand name of the hearing aid you and your audiologist select for your particular hearing loss.

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These “open fit” hearing aids provide a number of benefits to the wearer. The main one is comfort. Because the hearing aids do not require a custom ear mold, instead using a small soft open plastic tip. They do not occlude the ear canal and most people notice that after a very short time you don’t even know you are wearing them. They allow your own voice to sound natural. The low frequency sounds enter the ear normally bypassing the hearing aid which amplifies only the high frequencies. Because they are small and fit above the ear with the amplified sound entering through the almost invisible thin tube or wire, they are almost completely invisible. While we don’t usually like to stress this as an advantage, it can be important to some people who are just beginning to wear hearing aids. Another thing that will be noticed, that when properly fitted and adjusted, the perception is that the hearing aids don’t make sounds necessarily louder rather just clearer. The reason for this is that they are only required to amplify the high frequency sounds you are missing and the rest of what you hear enters the ear normally.

These new “high tech” hearing aids are now manufactured by most of the hearing aid companies. There are minor differences between the various brands and often the features that are touted are called by different names. Some of these features available include directional microphones, noise reduction or cancellation, telecoils, wind noise management, feedback

All opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association or CHHA – North Shore Branch.

suppression or cancellation, multiple memories and remote controls. They also come with varying degrees of sophistication ranging from entry level aids to those for advanced users. There are also models for the highly technical person. These include the capability to connect to cell phones, iPods, television and radio using Bluetooth technology. Whatever your lifestyle and needs, there is a modern “open fit” hearing aid system that will transport you back into the hearing world again. The time for action is now, not later.

Sound Advice

Presented by:

**The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
North Shore Branch**

**The group meets on the first Friday of each
month from 10:00 AM to 12 Noon**

(Holidays excepted) at the West Vancouver
Seniors’ Activity Centre’s Learning Studio,
695 21st Street in West Vancouver.

(No Meeting in July and August)

When we meet, we discuss topics and issues
dealing with hearing loss.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Bring a friend, a family member,
they are welcome too.

Subjects to be addressed will include:

Technology; Coping Strategies;

Improving Relationships;

Improving Hearing Environments

For Information call: 604-926-5222



**CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION
NORTH SHORE BRANCH
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Prov. _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

Please mail application to:

CHHA—North Shore Branch

Attention: Treasurer

600 West Queens Road

North Vancouver, B.C.

V7N 2L3

Cheque enclosed

Money Order Enclosed

Charitable Registration No.

BN 89672 3038 RR0001

I wish to support the aims of CHHA and the North Shore Branch and enclose my \$35.00 annual membership fee. (National \$25.00, Branch \$10.00). Membership is paid annually from 1 October to 30 September.