



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

North Shore Branch

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Mountain Ear

President's Message A Momentous Step

Recently I was asked to speak to a women's study group. This group, made up of mostly hearing women, wanted to know how they could help with those who couldn't hear during their discussions.



As I accepted their invitation, I felt excited. It seemed to me that a momentous step in the history of our North Shore community was going to take place! Let me explain.

Yes, we people with hearing loss are learning to accept our disability and how we can cope with it. We are purchasing hearing aids, attending members' meetings and Sound Advice, reading the material CHHA sends our way, and telling others to please speak more slowly and clearly, et cetera! Assistive listening devices are becoming more readily available in our public buildings. And great advances are taking place in hearing technology so hearing aids are becoming useful.

So what is so special about these women's request?

Here was a group of women saying, "Hearing loss isn't just "their" problem for them to solve. It's OUR problem, and we want to help with the solution. We don't know exactly how to do this. Can you tell us what will help everyone to hear?"

Isn't that the last major step toward full accessibility for us with hearing loss? When a community gets involved so we can be included in their discussions, jokes and stories, I see a community taking yet another step in accessibility for those with disabilities.

And that is something to get excited about.

At our April 18th members' meeting, I will be giving a presentation that will focus on how hearing people and those with hearing loss can work together to "help everyone hear". Please invite those important people in your life to join us!

Til next time,

Flo

April Meeting

Monday, April 18, 2005

Place: The Summerhill
135 West 15th Street
North Vancouver



Guest Speaker:
Flo Spratt, President
CHHA – North Shore Branch

**Living With Hearing Loss In Your Family
Are YOU Helping? Are YOU Coping?**

Meetings are Hearing and Wheelchair Accessible
Refreshments will be served

Wellness Show 2005

This year the North Shore Branch was invited to organize the CHHA booth at the 13th Annual Wellness Show held at the Vancouver Trade & Convention Centre from February 4th to 6th, 2005. This was the second year CHHA has taken a booth at the show and once again it was deemed a worthwhile venture in promoting CHHA and offering information and help to those with a hearing loss. During the three days of the show, we had many enquiries about hearing loss, tinnitus, hearing aids and assistive listening devices. We were also able to promote our February 21st meeting, and judging by the turnout at the meeting a number of North Shore residents took advantage to come and hear about hearing aids and FM systems.



We would like to thank the many volunteers who manned the booth over the 3 days. These were Birgit Cook, Helga Enns, Lynda Hepworth, Hugh Hetherington, Dailaan Shaffer, Flo Spratt, Carol Suggitt, Rick Waters, John Williams, and Jim Wilson. We would also especially like to thank Chris Hepworth for his willing assistance in setting up and taking

February Meeting

The February meeting of the North Shore Branch took place at the Summerhill on Monday, February 21st, 7:00 PM. There were 54 people in attendance to hear the presentations by our two guest speakers. Cindy Greening, Western Business Development Manager for GN Resound Canada spoke on the sub-

ject of digital hearing aid technology, and Sandra Vandenhoff, M.Sc., Aud(C), FM Systems Sales & Support with Phonak Canada Ltd. spoke on FM systems and why they are needed when hearing aids are not enough.

Cindy began her presentation by explaining the audiogram and how it is used to show the degree of hearing loss. She cited the typical case where the wife thinks the husband has a hearing loss and the husband thinks the wife mumbles and how this is one of the most prevalent types of hearing loss, ie. high frequency hearing loss. With this type of hearing loss, often a condition of aging but can also be caused by other factors, such as excessive noise exposure, the vowel sounds are heard relatively well while the consonants, especially the syllabants like t, s, sh, f, ch are indistinct. This makes it more difficult to understand speech especially in noisy environments.

After showing a timeline history of hearing aid development, Cindy described the various styles of hearing aids on the market ranging from the tiny in the canal aids to the larger behind the ear hearing aids. She then went on to answer the burning question every one came to hear, how can digital technology help me? Fortunately, we are at a time when there is a wide range of "New Age" instruments on the market capable of providing the hearing aid wearer with many advantages and able to accommodate hearing losses which were previously difficult or impossible to adequately fit.

Some of these digital benefits include: natural sound quality, directional technology to help zero in on sounds, noise reduction to give optimum speech clarity in background noise and feedback suppression. Digital technology gives the advantage of being able to amplify soft high frequency sounds for clarity while reducing loud sounds for comfort. Directional microphones are able to provide optimum background noise reduction. Programmable aids are able to switch between directional and omni-directional modes to cover different listening situations. Using sound demonstrations Cindy demonstrated the difference between different noise reduction systems in digital hearing aids.

One of the more exciting new features in digital hearing aids is digital feedback suppression (DFS). This allows the hearing aid to reduce or suppress the whistling sound of feedback without reducing the volume

or loudness of the sound. Again, sound demos were used to show how speech sounds with feedback whistling, then feedback management through gain



ReSoundAIR Hearing Aid

reduction, followed by feedback management with DFS. This clearly demonstrated that speech was much clearer with the DFS. The real benefit with DFS is to make it possible for hearing aids to employ what is called

“open technology.” That is, hearing aids that do not occlude the ear canal. GN Resound has a product called ReSoundAIR that takes advantage of this new digital technology to treat high frequency hearing loss.

Cindy outlined the design goals used in the development of this product, which are: high cosmetic appeal, maximizing wearer comfort by not occluding the ear canal and achieving optimum listening comfort by providing sufficient/optimum amplification to allow fitting a wide range of mild/moderate and/or high frequency hearing losses without the frustration of annoying feedback. She followed this up with a sound demonstration of a person eating a biscuit in closed, 2mm venting and open fitting to show how this sounded to them. She then did a similar sound demonstration using speech to show the differences in the sound of the person’s own voice.

Unfortunately, open fittings are not for everyone. A hearing test by a hearing professional is necessary to

determine if a person is a candidate for this new technology. The person who will qualify for ResoundAIR will be a new or existing hearing aid user with mild or high frequency hearing loss. Cindy also pointed out, however, that as the ReSoundAIR hearing aid is software driven, the same physical hearing aid can be reprogrammed with ReSoundAIR PLUS software in order to cover a greater range of hearing losses. This is also an advantage for the ReSoundAIR user who’s hearing loss advances. The same hearing aid can be reprogrammed to adjust for the new loss. Cindy closed her presentation by calling for questions from the audience.

For the second part of the evening, Sandra Vandenhoff was able to give us the perspective on “when hearing aids are not enough.” There are those with more severe hearing loss, such that, even with powerful hearing aids speech sounds present difficulty in understanding. For these people, we have to look beyond hearing aids.

Sandra, who is herself hearing impaired, is an audiologist now employed with Phonak Canada Ltd. She was previously in practice in Kamloops, B.C. She says that the keys to success are:

- ◆ Have a realistic perspective. “Don’t sugar coat the problem, but don’t over blow it either. Having a hearing loss is hard, but it is not the end of the world. You can dislike using hearing aids/FM, but you still have to use them. There is not a day that goes by that I wish things were different.... but that’s the hand that’s been dealt.”
- ◆ A good sense of humour. “Laugh with me, not at me. Laugh at mistakes.”
- ◆ Develop ownership of your hearing loss. “Be assertive – Tell others what you need. Wear your hearing aids consistently. Don’t try to hide hearing loss. Don’t wing it! (pretend to understand) Recognize that it all starts with you – your decisions and actions are the ones that matter. Ask for help when you need it.”
- ◆ Become technologically savvy. “Embrace technology. Learn all about hearing aids. (the choices are huge today) Learn all about FM (they are very small and very sophisticated today) Learn about cochlear implants. Learn about other technologies. (E-mail, Internet, Blackberry, Web-cams, Bluetooth, MP3, DVD)

In talking about hearing loss, she says there are two problems: first, when sounds are too soft, the solution

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Attention: Treasurer

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North Vancouver, B.C. V7N 2L3

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is hearing aids. Second, when sounds are not clear, especially in background noise, the solutions are directional microphones and FM systems. Three things that make speech difficult to hear in the real world, even with hearing aids are: Background noise, Reverberation (echo), and Distance. Many of the activities we enjoy today take place in the presence of background noise. In discussing this, Sandra explained signal to noise ratio (SNR). This represents the difference in relative loudness between the speech we want to hear and the background noise. Using a number of graphs, she explained that the greater our hearing loss, the greater the SNR needs to be to understand words in noise.

FM systems are designed to improve the SNR by artificially moving the ears closer to the source of the sound using FM radio technology.



Phonak has developed the MicroLink® FM System. It is not only compatible with all Phonak BTE instruments, but is compatible with almost all BTE models from the industry's leading hearing instrument manufacturers. It is miniature in size and easy to use. The FM receivers attach to the hearing aid using a boot. Communication to the hearing aids is from the HandyMic transmitter. The transmitter can be carried, hung around the neck or set on a table. It



wirelessly transmits the sound to the user's hearing aids. It features three microphone settings: 1. Wide angle using an omni-directional microphone. 2. Zoom using a directional microphone. 3. Super zoom using two directional microphones. The HandyMic may also be plugged into other audio sources, such as, TV, radio, CD player, MP3 player, computer, etc. for wireless listening.

Phonak's newest product in the FM market is Smartlink SX® heralded as the gateway to communication. It is small and easy to use and is two sided for differentiation of functions. On one side it has the advanced microphone functions, and on the other side, extended communications functions. It can be carried in the pocket, hung around the neck or placed on the table. It can also be used as a remote control for Phonak remote enabled hearing aids and can be

plugged into any sound source for wireless listening enjoyment

Telephone communication, particularly on the cell phone, remains one of the greatest challenges for hearing impaired people. Smartlink provides a solution and makes cell phone use a reality. You can have phone access anywhere, anytime and with hands free functionality. It connects to the cell phone wirelessly using Bluetooth® technology and transmits to the user's hearing aids via FM.

Use of modern communication and information tools is often out of bounds for people with hearing loss. Smartlink closes this gap and makes access to high tech devices possible. The final question on the presentation: Which will help you hear better in noise? A: High End Digital. Or B: Entry Digital and FM. The answer according to Sandra is B.

Our sincere thanks go to both Cindy Greening and Sandra Vandenhoff for giving us this insightful look into the high-tech world of hearing aid technology today. We received many comments following the meeting about how much people were able learn through the two presentations.



Hearing Loss and Hearing Aids Revisited

By Hugh Hetherington

“I can hear fine when I am communicating one to one in quiet locations. It's when everyone is speaking at once that I can't make out what is being said.” If you can relate to this statement it obviously prompts the question, “Why is it harder to understand what is being said in noisy surroundings?” I think people with good hearing also have some difficulty communicating in noise but are able to cope better because they hear the full spectrum of sound. Their brain is also able to better categorize the many sounds and focus

on those that they need to hear. However, separate the two hearing people across the crowded room and the situation becomes quite different. In a noisy location, it is the low frequency sounds that carry the furthest, but it is the high frequency sounds that are so important in making speech intelligible and these are masked by the low frequencies. In those with hearing impairment, the high frequencies may already be significantly lost making it difficult or impossible even in close up situations.

There is no doubt, hearing loss can adversely affect an individual's quality of life and make it more difficult to function in our society. Interpersonal communication is a vital human need. While hearing loss can be devastating to the hearing impaired person, we must also consider the broader implications of the effect on those close to the individual and to society in general. An interesting observation that I have made in taking questions over the years regarding hearing loss is that the question often begins with, "My husband, my wife, my father, or my mother....." This observation speaks for itself and says the hearing loss obviously has broader implications among family and friends or associates. A person whose hearing is deteriorating can often re-

main in denial for many years, putting the blame on the mumblers or people who speak too softly or too quickly. Too often the situation has to become intolerable before those in denial tend to seek out help for themselves.

What can also compound the situation are the misconceptions about hearing loss held by the general public. Because the person can sometimes hear and understand while other times not, this leads to statements like, "Oh, he can hear when he wants to" or "She just ignored me." It is also a known fact that a hard of hearing individual can take, on average, about three times longer to comprehend a statement. This is especially true for conversation openings where previous context is lacking. More often than not, a repeat of the statement is requested, by which time the meaning may have been deduced and the repeat is not necessary. At other times, the person may just end up with erroneous information. The resulting frustration can lead to anxiety, fatigue and even anger which can be directed inwardly, outwardly, or both. The result is a loss in the quality of life, not just for the hearing impaired, but also for those around them.

(Continued on page 6)

CHHA National Conference June 2 to 5, 2005.

**Grand Okanagan Lakefront Resort
& Conference Centre
Kelowna , B.C.**



Thursday, June 2: Welcome Reception and Trade Show

Friday, June 3: Opening session followed by workshops, Trade Show and Silent Auction

Saturday, June 4: Workshops, Silent Auction and Awards Banquet

Sunday, June 5: Natural Sounds Tours (not included in the cost of the conference)

Included in the Conference is the banquet and awards ceremony, trade show, workshops, meals, and entertainment.

**For Registration Rates and Information see the CHHA Website:
www.chha.ca or call CHHA National at 1-800-263-8068**

What action can be taken to improve the quality of life for the hearing impaired? While not ignoring that some hearing impairments may be corrected by medical interventions including surgery, hearing aids are the most obvious and readily available solution. Hearing aids will certainly make things better, but depending on the severity and cause of the hearing loss, one must also be realistic and not necessarily expect perfect hearing to be restored.

Hearing aid technology has made significant advances in the last few years. The improvements digital technology has made in the computer and recording industries, it has also made in the hearing aid industry. I have often heard statements like, "Oh, I tried hearing aids, they just made things worse" or "I have hearing aids, they are at home in the drawer." My question invariably to these people is, "How long ago was that?" or "How old are the aids?" It may be time to revisit a hearing professional and try again. Vast improvements have been made in both sound quality and comfort. For those considering hearing aids for the first time, they may be pleasantly surprised at the results they get. Hearing losses which were previously difficult or even impossible to adequately help five to ten years ago can now be satisfactorily helped with the latest digital hearing aids. Don't let hearing loss impair your quality of life or of those around you. Take action.

Hearing Accessibility

West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre

To make the WVSAC more accessible to those seniors with a hearing impairment, CHHA - North Shore Branch in conjunction with the maintenance staff at the Centre have equipped three of the activity rooms with inductive loop systems and have donated an Infrared transmitter for the Audio-Visual Room. The loop wiring and design engineering was provided by our Branch and the loop amplifiers by the WVSAC. The three rooms now with loop systems are: The Learning Studio, The Atrium, and the main Activity Room.

Inductive loop systems are designed to work with hearing aids that are equipped with a telecoil (T-Switch). The hearing aid wearer should switch their hearing aid to the "T" position or select the telephone program. If your group or meeting wishes to use the loop system in any of the rooms, please consult one

Sound Advice

A monthly series of informal workshops and discussions around issues affecting the hard of hearing.

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 at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre's Learning Studio, 695 21st Street in West Vancouver.

Come and join us and other Hard of Hearing people who get together to share and discuss.

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;

Speech Reading

Behavioural Issues;

Improving Relationships

Improving Hearing Environments

For Information call: 604-926-5222 or

Fax: 604-925-2286

of the staff members at the WVSAC. If you are unsure as to whether your hearing aid is compatible with loop systems, you should ask your audiologist if your hearing aid has a telecoil. Most behind-the-ear hearing aids and some of the in-the-ear hearing aids have a telecoil incorporated. The infrared transmitter in the Audio-Visual room has now been installed and the Seniors' Centre will be purchasing receivers to use with the system in the near future.

Similarly, the Fish Bowl meeting room at the West Vancouver Aquatic Centre has been equipped with a loop system for the benefit of the hearing impaired meeting in that room.

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