HOORAY FOR HEARING LOOPS

Kudos to The Hearing Journal for making the topic of loops and telecoils front-page news! (HJ 2012;64[9]:14; http://bit.ly/HJseptCover.) I will be the first to say that wireless connectivity, increasingly available from a variety of hearing aid manufacturers, is a definite improvement in the quality of life for many of my patients, regardless of age. Audiologists and dispensers, however, are forgetting the age-old t-coil, which is just as powerful. I believe for the foreseeable future there will always be a need for loops and telecoils. We need to give our patients the best of both worlds.

We are fortunate in New Mexico to have an amazing advocacy group, Loop New Mexico, an initiative of the Hearing Loss Association of Albuquerque, and people like Juliette Sterkens, AuD, who advocate for loops. New Mexico has more than 70 public venues and churches looped through the tireless work of individuals like HLAA's Steve Frazier. Our looping initiative has been spearheaded by consumers who know what a difference it can make in their lives. Practitioners need to join forces with consumers and raise our voices to the hearing aid manufacturers who may not realize how this improves quality of life, even in open fit devices. I cannot think of a better way to raise public awareness of hearing loss.

Carol Clifford, AuD Albuquerque, NM

Dr. Sterkens responds: Thank you for writing this letter in support of hearing loops. It is good that we audiologists are raising our voice to let the hearing healthcare community know how hearing loops improve quality of life. You are right: the “age-old t-coil” is currently the only technology that will link users in large venues.

Everyone involved with hearing loops knows how each loop raises awareness of hearing loss and that this is good for business. Imagine if every manufacturer would offer co-op funding for an installed hearing loop like they now offer for one-page ads in newspapers. We would reach a tipping point in the hearing loop movement in no time and everyone benefits, particularly hearing aid users.

HIGH PRAISE FOR HEARING LOOPS

Thanks for the wonderful cover story, “A Surge in Hearing Loops Gives Hearing-Impaired Front Row Seats.” (HJ 2012;64[9]:14; http://bit.ly/HJseptCover.) We, too, are advocating for hearing loops in Lafayette, IN, and two worship facilities were recently looped. The responses have been amazing, even though we are only in our first few weeks of getting the word out. We have several patients’ testimonials, which include sentiments such as, “This was the first time I have heard a sermon in years! I am amazed at the sound quality! I was a teenager when I last heard this well.”

Looping America will take a team effort. Manufacturers provide the product; audiologists evaluate the t-coil performance, demonstrate how the product works, dispense the product, and educate the consumer. The consumer then becomes the torchbearer and we ALL benefit! The efforts of the Let’s Loop America campaign would best be served by audiologists distinguishing themselves at those who provide patients with total hearing management versus just dispensing hearing aids. With this increase in knowledge, each practitioner can answer with a resounding “yes” to the question put to us from the joint statement from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Academy of Audiology, and the Academy of Dispensing Audiologists about changes in hearing health delivery: Do you provide treatment for hearing loss that reflects the full scope of practice for audiologists?

Mary Cavaron, PhD, & Susan Lopez, AuD Lafayette, IN

Dr. Sterkens excitedly recalls Richard Einhorn lost most of his hearing in 2010, suddenly and irreversibly, when he was 57. He feared he would never enjoy a live musical performance again. A year later, however, he attended a production of the musical “Wicked” at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, which had temporary hearing loops installed for those attending the annual Hearing Loss of America Convention.

Mr. Einhorn wrote to the Kennedy Center after the performance to urge them to install permanent hearing loop technology. “That evening was, by far, the clearest, most enjoyable performance I’ve attended since my hearing loss,” he said. “It meant so much to me to sit in a concert hall and, for the first time in a year, actually enjoy a live performance again.”

More and more people with hearing loss across America are having the revelation Mr. Einhorn experienced. Thousands of new locations, from churches to theaters to the New York City subway system, have been looped in the past two years since the American Academy of Audiology and the Hearing Loss Association of America collaborated to create the public education campaign, “Get in the Hearing Loop.” The campaign received an enormous boost from Mr. Einhorn’s experience. The New York Times featured a front-page article about hearing loops on Oct. 23, leading with Mr. Einhorn’s experience. The story was the Times’ second most emailed article for the prior month by Oct. 25. (See FastLinks.) “Within the last six months, things have exploded with accelerating momentum,” said David Myers, a hearing-impaired professor of psychology at Hope College in Holland, MI. Mr. Myers founded Hearing-Loop.org to help campaign for universal looping. (See FastLinks.) “The New York Times story led to other media picking up on the issue — National Geographic in their April issue and the Washington Post in [April]. Now, the biggest event of them all: two major suppliers of audio technology, Listen Technologies and Williams Sound, announced within three days of each other that they would be bringing hearing loops and training installers throughout their national network of audiovisual dealers. They both say that this is in response to growing consumer demand for the technology.” (See FastLinks.)

New York City’s Metropolitan Transit Authority also looped some 500 subway booths, and in April the city announced that it had awarded the contract for all its future taxicabs to Nissan. The “Taxi of Tomorrow” will be fully looped.

THE HEARING JOURNAL

Cover Story

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Hearing Loss of America Convention.

Midwest Leads the Pack

Despite coverage of big Eastern cities like New York and Washington, DC, the heart of hearing loop country has long been the Midwest. Hearing loops are a word-of-mouth technology, said Juliette Sterkens, AuD, who has taken a year-long leave from her Oshkosh, WI, audiology practice to become HLAA’s hearing loop advocate. “Every hearing loop boosts other hearing loops,” she said. Dr. Sterkens excitedly reported that she had just received notice of a $20,000 donation toward installing loops in her community’s hospital which will be the first in the state to have them.

The modern classical composer Richard Einhorn lost most of his hearing in 2010, suddenly and irreversibly, when he was 57. He feared he would never enjoy a live musical performance again. A year later, however, he attended a production of the musical “Wicked” at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, which had temporary hearing loops installed for those attending the annual Hearing Loss of America Convention.

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A Surge in Hearing Loops Gives
Hearing-Impaired Front Row Seats

By Gina Shaw

The Hearing Journal
hearing loops at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in Appleton, WI, a popular venue that features performances of everything from Barbra Streisand and the Blue Man Group to "Billy Elliot," "Mamma Mia!" and Bill Cosby. "It’s an expensive installation, probably in the $150,000 range, so a donation of that size really makes the job easier," she said. "I want this to be among the first large performing arts centers in the country to have this well-designed IEC [International Electrochemical Commission] standard meeting hearing loop. We hope that other theater operators will take note and realize that improving accessibility for people with hearing loss makes good business sense considering the aging baby boomers."

Wisconsin currently has about 165 churches, centers, and small theaters that are looped, Dr. Sterkens said. "The pace is definitely accelerating. In the last three years, I have spoken to about 100 groups, to pretty much everyone who wants to listen: Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, ministers, and parent groups," she said. Public speaking is something any audiologist can do. I also have used my hearing aid patients, their children, and their connections in the community and around the country to foster loop installations."

Dr. Sterkens is to looping Wisconsin as Linda Remensnyder, AuD, is to looping Illinois. The founder of Hearing Associates in Libertyville, Dr. Remensnyder recently sent sheets on how to program hearing aids for loops to every Audiology Associates in Libertyville, Dr. Remensnyder recently sent sheets on how to program hearing aids for loops to every hearing aid patient, their children, and their connections in the community and around the country to foster loop installations."

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in his church, and he’s a veteran affiliated with the station. He went to the command about it, and now they’re getting looped," said Dr. Remensnyder.

BRINGING IT HOME
Loops are not just for public venues. The Santa Rosa, CA, team of Bill Diles, MA, and Christine Diles, AuD, has looped almost 1,900 home televisions in their area over the past nine years. "We offer a free loop with the purchase of a hearing aid to all of our patients," Mr. Diles said. Hearing aids do not work well with television, but the Diles have found it difficult to convince the audiology community to get on board with looping homes. "It’s so elegant once it’s installed. You spend one hour in a house, and it’s set for life," he said. But that is beginning to change. "I tried to make a business of selling loops to audiologists five years or so ago and gave up on it, but now there’s a lot of push again. Some people say, ‘Oh, to loop patients’ homes I have to send someone to their house.’ No, you get to send someone to their house. That’s a personal touch. Now you’ve put a loop in their house, and they’re way more likely to buy their next hearing aid from you."

The Diles have also looped more than 40 public venues as well, including bank counters, churches, community auditoriums, pharmacies, and libraries. "Right now we’re working to loop a local five-auditorium cinema showing independent films," Mr. Diles said. "Some 70 percent of their patrons are like ‘Beauty and the Beast.’"

David Myers

FastLinks

• Visit David Myer’s site at http://hearingloop.org.
• Click and Connect! Access the links in The Hearing Journal by reading this issue on our website or in our new iPad app, both available at thehearingjournal.com.
• Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/hearingjournal and like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/HearingJournal.