

Minutes Hearing Aid SIG October 8, 2009

Jim Wooll called the meeting to order at 3 PM. He announced that the November speaker will be someone from the Audiology Department at UT. He then introduced our speakers from Hearing Research Institute of Round Rock. They were Kelly Kelley and Paul Jay.

Kelly Kelley described himself as a “geek”. His background is computers and electronics and gave a history of hearing aids. He mentioned that Ma Bell did the basic research for the hearing aid industry as a hearing aid is just a way to get sound from there to our ears. Until 1993 all hearing aids were analogue and they just made the microphones and amplifiers smaller and clearer. They may have had a volume knob.

The human ear (without hearing problems) can hear sounds ranging from 20 hertz to 20,000 hertz. Speech generally ranges from 1000 to 6000 hertz. A hearing aid is “just” a prosthesis (as glasses are) and does not actually cure our hearing, as when it is removed, we hear the same way we did before we had it (or them). There is no degree program in fitting hearing aids.

They provided a few statistics on hearing aids

20-30% are returned in the first 30 days

An additional 20% end up in the dresser drawer

Of the people who keep them and wear them about 30% are really satisfied. (Note that the people returning one brand may buy a different one – SMC note)

Most hearing aids are very similar as there are only three major chip companies in the US, but what varies greatly is

the software for fitting the hearing aid.

He gave an example that a mid range hearing aid may have 25 variables each with 10 distinct

settings, which provides for a minimum of combinations but for a single individual maybe only one or two of these will work. This is why he feels that about half the cost of the hearing aids is the programming, but the packages are still an all in one fee.

Their approach is to “look” at the cochlea and figure out where it is not responding (in terms of frequencies. They then want to see what is coming out of the hearing aid and see if it actually does what it should do. The problem is that we can't see if the cochlea is responding. They have some unique equipment that enables them (by using two computers) to fit the aids.

Their technique involves some sophisticated equipment that tests the way the hearing aid functions on a large number of frequencies and requires two computers one to program the aid, and the other to see what the program actually does.

They have a trial program for fitting and programming aids. They can work with any brand of hearing aid. The trial period is completely free, but they did not give us any indication of the range of potential charges for programming the aids. You don't pay anything unless you are completely satisfied. Much of their handouts were testimonials from satisfied customers. They have a website (<http://www.allexperts.com>) which has most of their material.