

FEBRUARY 2013 HEARING SOLUTIONS MEETING

MEMBER STORIES:

Hearing Aids Administered and Dispensed by the VA

Mike Glackin told a story of a two year tour of military duty in Vietnam that contributed to his hearing loss and showed a 1967 magazine article that sold for 35 cents with a full page picture of rockets and machine guns going off all over the area where he was standing next to the photographer and told of being in this noisy environment for the period of his tour.

Upon discharge he received a physical exam in which his hearing was tested and he was told his hearing was “effective” and not classified as a disability so he did what he had to do-he coped with the loss for the next 40+ years.

Mike talked to the Veteran’s Administration about his loss and was told that over the years their opinion about hearing loss has evolved and they are now helping Veterans with hearing loss that were in combat so he decided to apply for VA assistance in September, 2011. He was told his claim would probably be denied but he decided to “roll the dice”. He received letters from the VA over a long period of time advising him that they were still considering his claim and finally he was admitted to the VA hospital in Temple, Texas for a hearing test which consisted of two parts.

The first part was a pure tone test in which he was told to push a button when he heard a tone so he immediately pushed the button and held it down. When questioned, he explained that he heard a continuous tone and thus he was diagnosed as having tinnitus. Initially, he had hoped the VA could fix his tinnitus but subsequently learned that was not possible and he must live with the condition.

Mike mentioned that he had been looking forward to the Tinnitus meeting presentation given by Doctor Kupperman in January but was out of town and unable to attend the meeting.

NOTE: FOR OTHERS THAT MISSED THAT MEETING YOU CAN ACCESS THE MEETING NOTES FROM THE HEARING SOLUTIONS WEB PORTAL PAGE.

The second part was for word recognition. Sentences would be read to him and he would be asked to repeat them. He thought this was a pretty revealing test as he had been tested two previous times elsewhere and those tests only consisted of the tone part.

Subsequently, he was reclassified as being eligible for hearing aids and scheduled an appointment to be fitted. He watched while the dispenser opened a drawer in which he observed the fitter chose Phonak BTE Naida from 7 or 8 different styles of aids which were fitted to him and he left with the aids, some batteries and wax shields in January, 2013.

Mike reported that he hears much better since he got his aids and asked if anyone has questions and comments.

Q: What criteria did the VA use in the approval decision?

A: Mike stated he was classified as a Category 8 when he made his application. After the testing was performed he was eventually reclassified to a Category 4. He thinks that the combat environment played a large role in the decision and he submitted the name of his officer and people with whom he served which also may have been a factor.

C: The comment was that the VA had been approached about two years ago about consideration for hearing aids and the commenter was told by the VA at that time that the exit hearing test was the key to approval/disapproval.

Q: What VA facility did you go to the first time?

A: Cedar Park.

C: The comment was that there is a VA office in Georgetown on the Inner Loop which might be a starting point but it is not a clinic.

NRA Member Program for Discounted Hearing Aids

Ted Greenslait told of his hearing loss experience which was also related to his military exposure to loud sounds but he was not able to produce the proof necessary for VA dispensed hearing aids.

He described his hearing loss experience as “Shocking”. First, when it was confirmed that he actually did have a hearing loss and second, when he learned the price of hearing aids. He further described his experience in terms of the following phases:

First phase-Denial.

Second phase-Confirmation of loss by a professional. Ted started with his primary healthcare physician who referred him to Dr. Scott Franklin (ENT) in Georgetown who, after performing a thorough and comprehensive examination, confirmed his loss and recommended hearing aids. He was then introduced to a staff Audiologist who recommended the high end Starkey 3 Series 110 Vibrant Wireless aids which they happen to have available for sale all packaged together with the cost of fitting and dispensing for about \$3,250 which seemed like an awful lot. He then learned that price was for one hearing aid and he would need two aids for a total investment of \$6,500 and that the useful life of the aids was approximately five years. “Sticker shock” set in, plus he was experiencing a strong sense of a conflict of interest. Ted decided to check other options before making a decision and joined the Hearing Solutions SIG where he was exposed to the vast amount of useful information available from almost four years of Meeting Notes, four pages of Forum Topics and members willing to share information.

Third phase-Evaluation, which involves understanding the type and extent of the hearing loss, what type of hearing assistance is appropriate and the cost of assistive hearing equipment required for the degree of loss he has. From Hearing Solutions, Ted was exposed to the “Consumer’s Guide To Hearing Aids” with a comparative list of hundreds of hearing aid makes, models, price ranges, styles and features. Ted was the first member of the SIG to obtain the 2013 edition just published.

NOTE: INFORMATION ON THE CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO HEARING AIDS IS AVAILABLE ON THE FORUM UNDER THE TOPIC

Ted learned that the same Starkey Vibrant aids could be purchased through reputable internet discounters with fitting and dispensing by reputable local providers recommended and used by members of Hearing Solutions for a savings of \$1,500 for two aids. Ted learned that manufacturers of hearing aids use the same marketing techniques as auto dealers in that they provide lower priced models of the top of the line aids with fewer features. Ted realized that maybe a Toyota would be adequate instead of a Lexus to deal with his moderate loss.

Fourth phase-Shopping for the appropriate cost/benefit provider and hearing aids for his particular loss. Ted is now starting this phase where he will be interviewing providers and evaluating hearing aids on a trial basis.

During the Third phase, while renewing his NRA membership, Ted stumbled on the fact the NRA provides a member benefit for hearing loss that is sponsored by Starkey in which a substantial discount can be obtained. Upon investigating he learned that by going through the program he could obtain the \$1,500 savings from a local provider used by some Hearing Solution members. Ted shared additional information about the NRA program to Hearing Solutions and pointed out that the annual dues to NRA are a mere \$35.

THIS INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE FORUM UNDER THE TOPIC "CONSUMERS GUIDE TO HEARING AIDS"

BEWARE OF FREE PHONE OFFERS FROM PROVIDERS

This subject was discussed in detail including examples, the purpose of these offers, the connection with the Texas STAP voucher program and other similar state programs. See Forum for details of this topic including Meeting Notes and Forum for information on the Texas STAP program

FORUM SURVEY

The Computer Club is committed to the success of the member forum and interested in making it a useful tool for research, mentor support and sharing common interest and ideas. I have learned that as new members come on board answers to the same questions is continuous. The forum is an ideal vehicle for providing a single answer(s) that can be continuously sourced over time by many. Additionally, while the Hearing Solutions SIG membership totals 220 and continues to grow our average attendance YTD is 39.5, which means for various reasons, the majority are never present at any given meeting. In addition to the Meeting Notes the forum is a unique tool to be informed and share information 24/7 at your leisure. The HS forum has three pages of topics with hundreds of threads.

One thing that is very important to the success of the forum is to make sure it is utilized because no matter how good an idea it appears to be if usage is nominal, it does not justify the expense and many hours of volunteered time to make it a success.

An impromptu survey based on a show of hands:

- How many have registered and accessed the Hearing Solutions Forum? **THE MAJORITY**
- How many have had difficulty with the registration process and failed to get access? **FEW**
- How many have registered but have difficulty navigating and making posts? **ONLY TWO**

All were reminded that to access the forum it is necessary to be a paid up member of the Computer Club.

Those encountering problems getting through the registration process or navigating the Hearing Solutions forum were asked to email hearing@sctxcompclub.org

LOCAL & AREA RETAIL HEARING AID DEALERS- COMPETITION-TACTICS-PRACTICES

A summary of local and area retail hearing aid dealers a/k/a providers was introduced and a discussion ensued of retail competition tactics used in the sale of marked up hearing aids bundled with fitting/dispensing and other fees. The discussion included comments on those dealers affiliated with or owned by manufacturers, franchise operations, chains, dispensers for internet discounters, volume discounters.

DETAILS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE FORUM UNDER PROVIDERS-
GENERAL