

# HEARING AIDS

A Report to the Community

# Agenda

- Hearing Aid SIG activities
- Do you really need a hearing aid?
- Hearing Test – what to look out for
- Reading your diagnosis
- The hearing aid marketplace
- Shopping for a provider – not a hearing aid
- Hearing Aid Provider business practices

# Disclaimer



- I am not a hearing professional
- I do not work for a hearing aid manufacturer
- I don't own stock in a hearing aid firm

# The Hearing Aid SIG



- Members experiences
- Internet Searching
- Speakers

# SIG Speakers

- Margaret Hutchison – Austin Hearing
- Suzette Fields – Legacy Hills Hearing Center
- Janet Krueger – Represents Starkey – a manufacturer
- Kelly Kelly – Hearing Research Institute
- Dr. Amanda Zappler – Clinical Supervisor and Professor of Speech and Hearing University of Texas Austin
- Joyce Parsons – Executive Director of Texas Board of Professional Licensing – Hearing
- Nancy Innes – Audiologist for Costco – Austin

# Signs that you may need a hearing aid

- Asking your spouse to repeat things
- TV too loud
- Difficulty hearing in noisy situations – very hard to be part of the group in a noisy restaurant
- Ringing in the ears – Tinnitus

# Myths about needing an Aid

- If you don't get a hearing aid now, your brain will lose the ability to process the sounds
- According to Dr Zappler – there is little research to support this claim

# Insurance and Medicare for Hearing Aids

- Generally not covered by insurance
- Covered by Medicaid
- May be covered by veterans benefits
  - ▣ One of the largest suppliers of hearing aids

# The steps to solving the problem

- See an Ear Doctor – is it a medical condition or just age
- Get a hearing test by an Audiologist – define the degree of your problem
- Find someone you trust to fit a hearing aid
  - ▣ Consider getting aids from two different providers

# A hearing test

- Three kinds of tests
  - ▣ Hearing of tones – low to high frequency
  - ▣ Recognition of words
  - ▣ Bone conduction
    - Helps identify a special kind of hearing loss
- Is there a sound proof booth?
- Was there a prompt in the word test?
  - ▣ “Say the word Pass” or just “Pass”

Last Name: Wooll \_\_\_\_\_

First Name: Jim \_\_\_\_\_

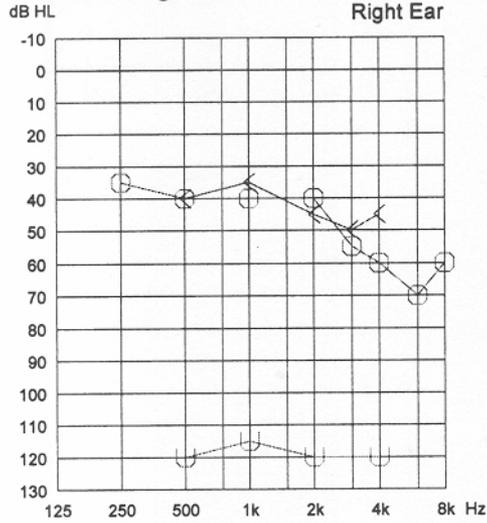
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Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

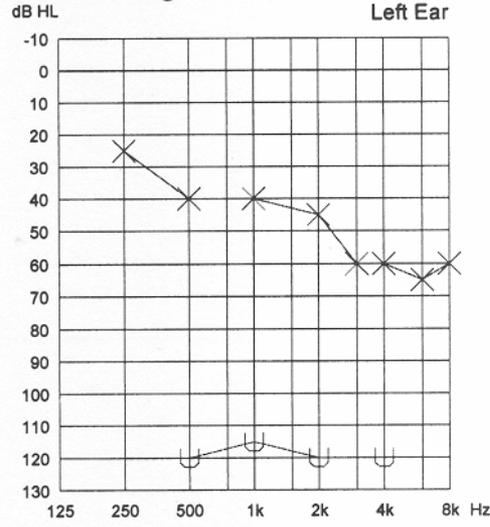
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Tone audiogram



dB Masking


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dB Masking

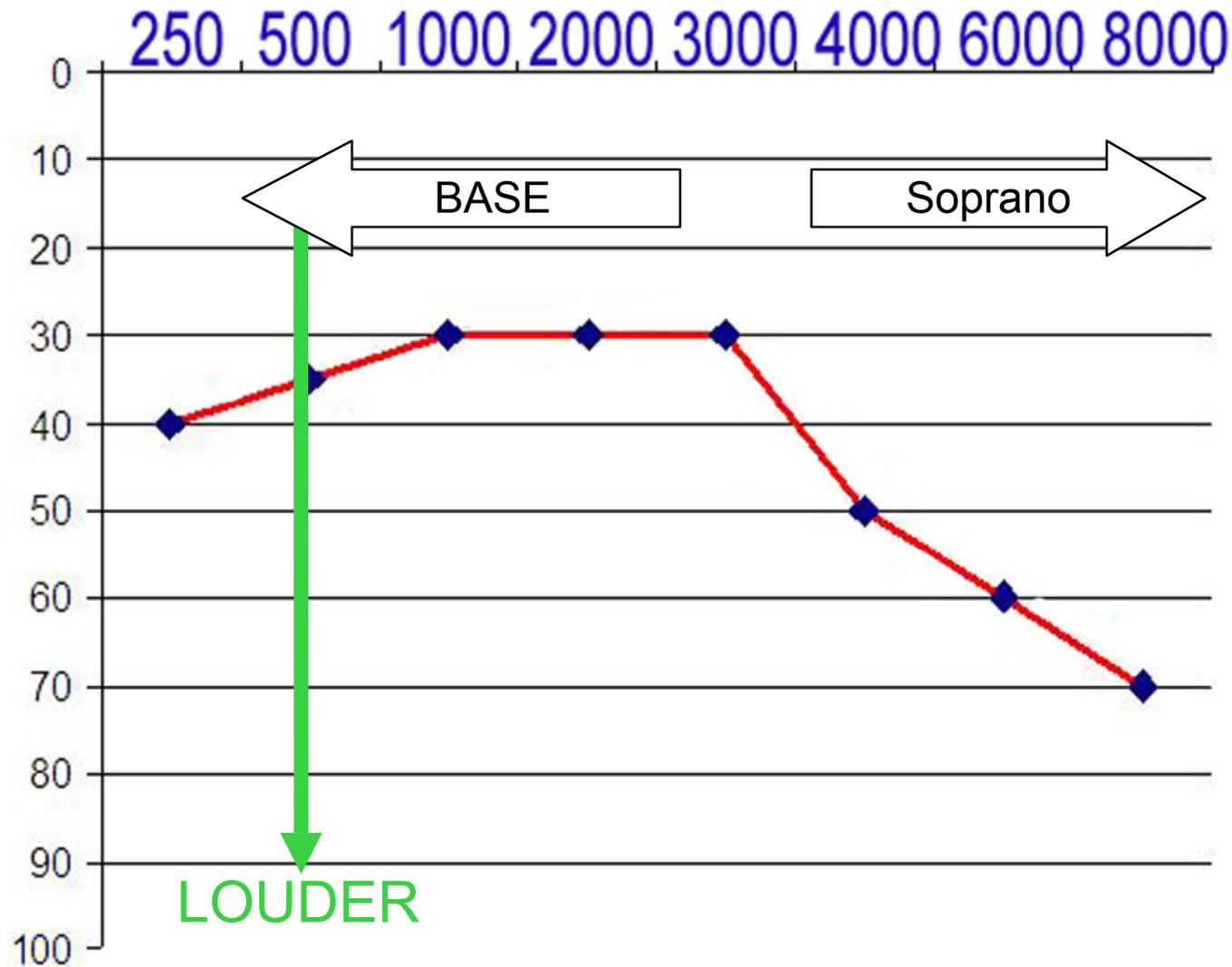
AC


BC


	Unmasked	Masked
<u>Air Conductor</u>		
Right:	○	△
Left:	×	□
<u>Air conductor MCL</u>		
Right:	▽	▽
Left:	▽	▽
<u>Air conductor UCL</u>		
Right:	○	○
Left:	○	○
<u>Bone Conductor</u>		
Right:	▽	▽
Left:	▽	▽
<u>No Response</u>		
Right:	↙	
Left:		↘

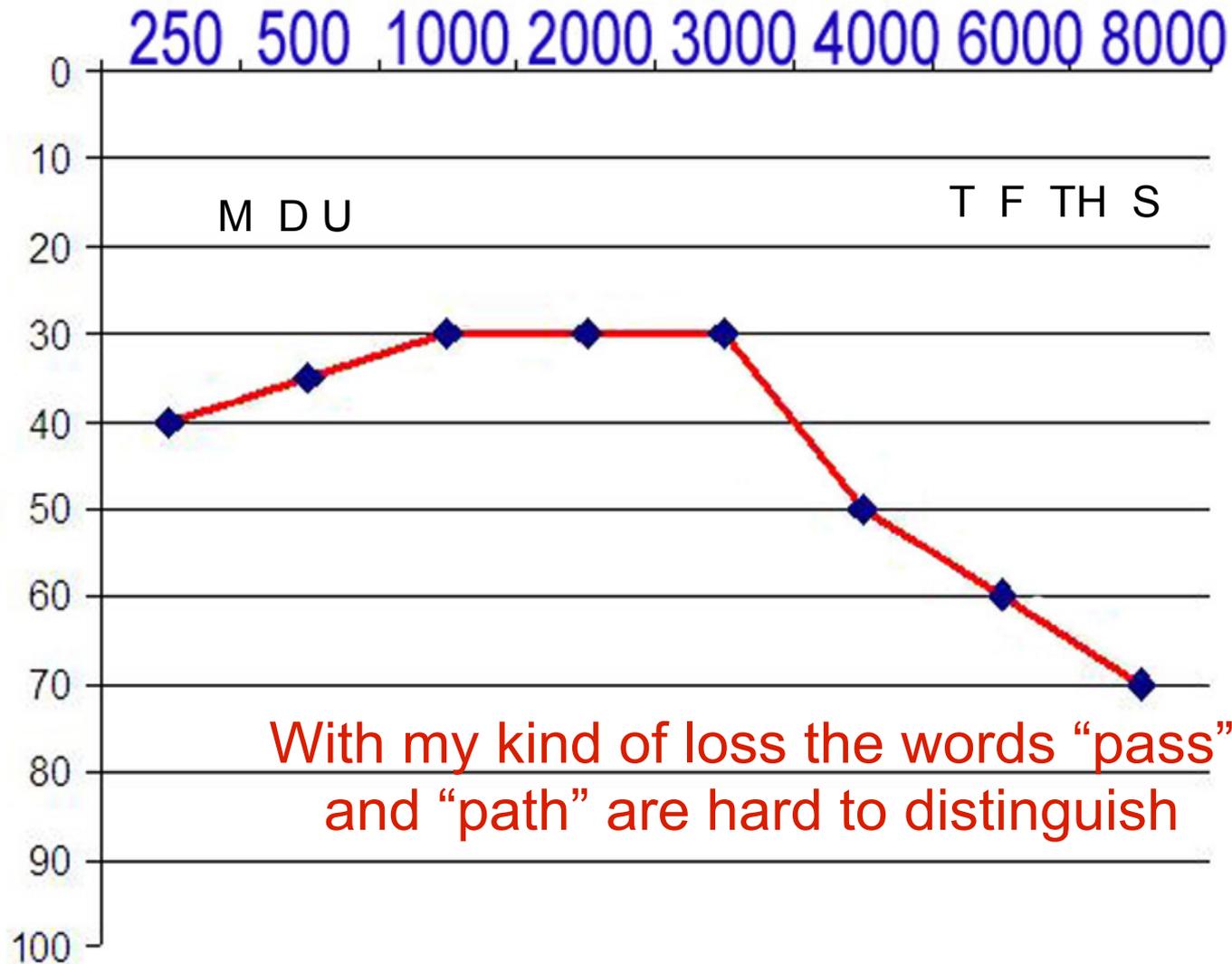
# Audiogram

Frequency



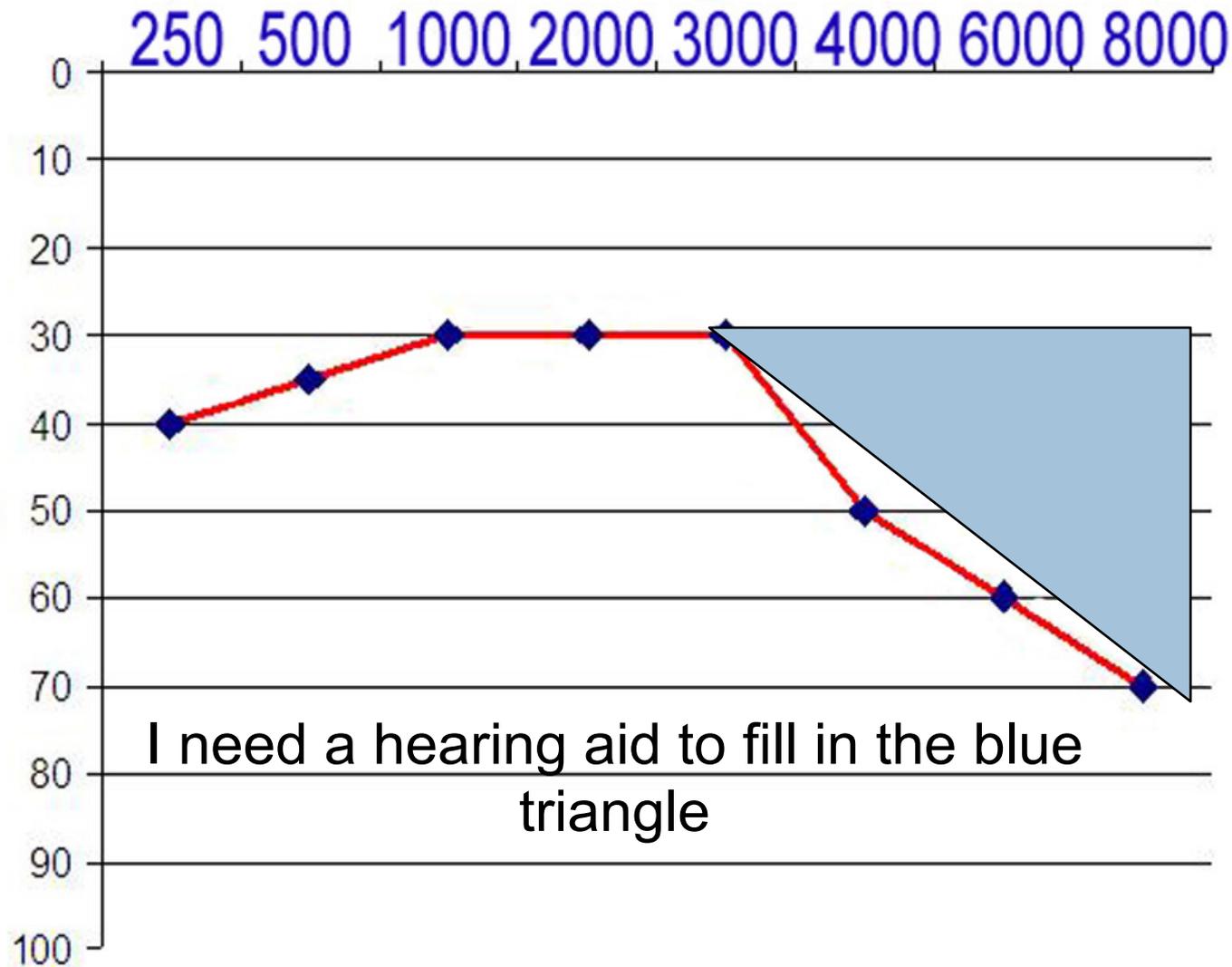
# Audiogram

Frequency



# Audiogram

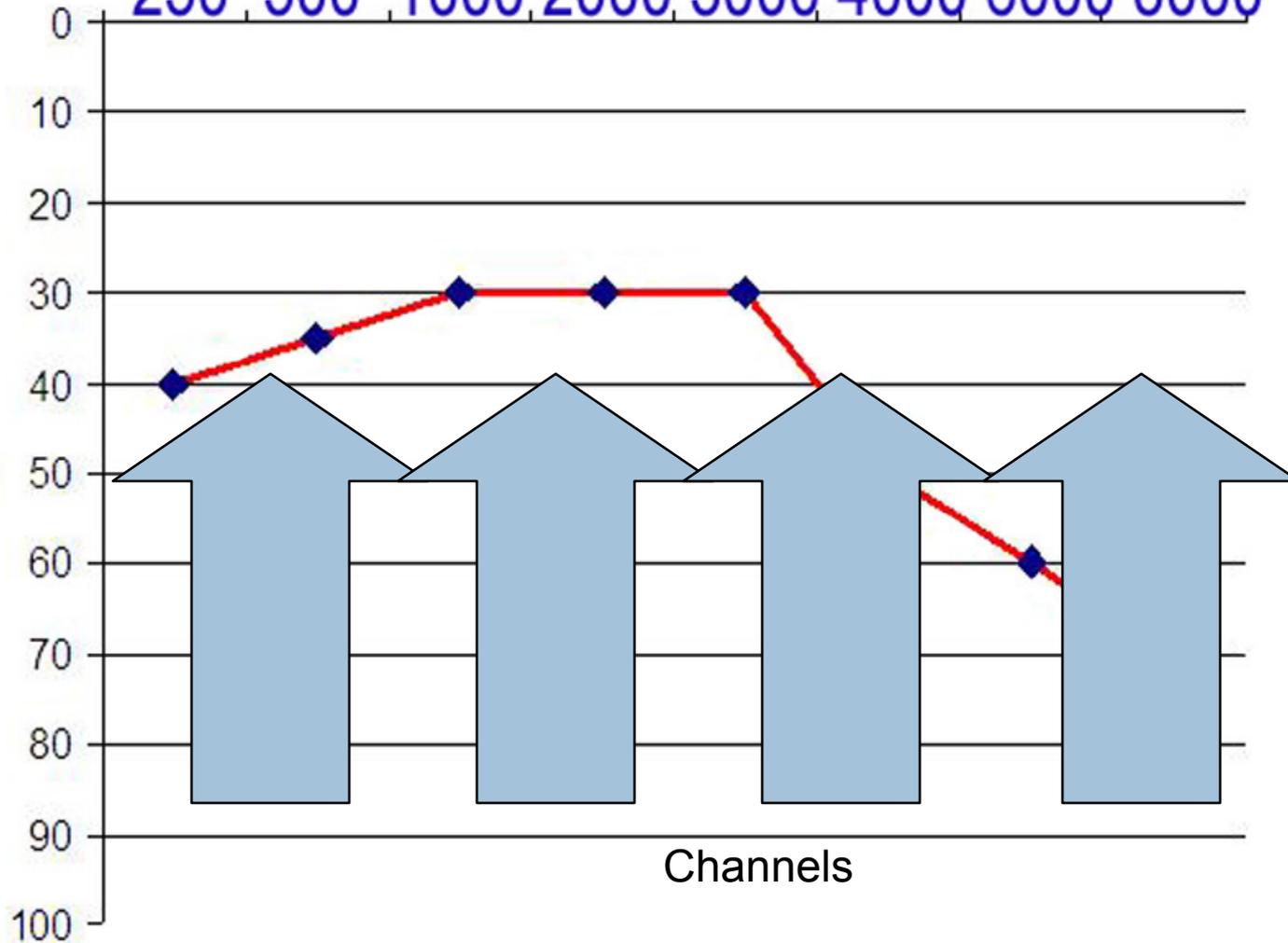
Frequency



# Audiogram

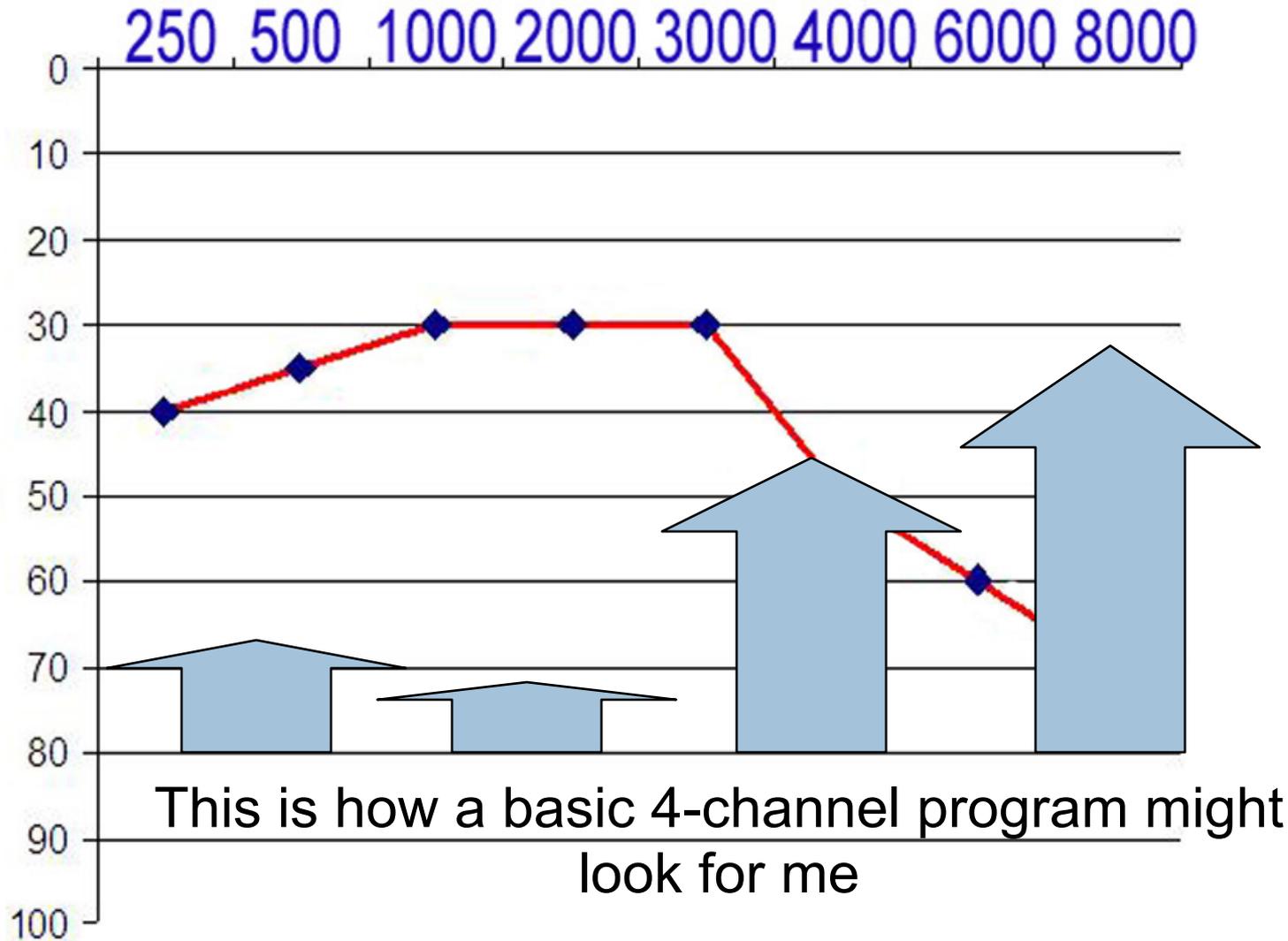
Frequency

250 500 1000 2000 3000 4000 6000 8000



# Audiogram

Frequency



# Ways to shop

- Research the product, select, find lowest price
- Talk to friends – get a recommendation for a Hearing Aid
- Look for a brand name you trust

None of the above will work well with hearing aids

You must find a provider you like and trust and rely on them.

Choosing a hearing aid provider is like picking a doctor or dentist.

# Buying a Hearing AID

- Many makers
  - 26 Brands by 7 Major makers
  - Over 200 models on the market
- Limited consumer information on hearing aid performance or quality
  - Consumer Reports Health July 2009
    - “Our research indicates that rating hearing aid brands and models on overall performance is not possible because people with seemingly identical hearing loss may hear differently using a particular product programmed the same way.

# Consumer Reports Health

## July 2009

- Best summary of hearing aids I have found
  - ▣ Survey of 1100 people with aids less than 3 years old
- Listed key features of 44 aids
  - ▣ Directional mikes
  - ▣ Feedback control
  - ▣ Telephone interface
- Overviews styles of aids
- Overviews kinds of hearing aid providers

# Other Features

- **Digital noise reduction** can reduce irritating background sounds
- **Low-battery indicator** sounds alert to change batteries
- **Power-on delay** helps prevent feedback
- **Wax guard**
- **Automatic volume control**
- **Manual volume control** lets you adjust volume.
- **Bluetooth capability** allows hands-free use of cell and regular phones and other electronics
- **Remote Control - volume, channel, off-on**

# Consumer Reports Findings

- High prices – \$1800 to \$6800 per pair
- Poorly fitted – two thirds were too much or too little power for the user.
- Many providers did not discuss features
- Average Markup – 117% – this is your clue to bargain --40% of buyers who asked for a discount got one

# The Bundle



# The Bundle

- You can't buy just an aid – only a bundle including:
  - Two-year warranty
  - Two-year loss protection
  - 30-day free return
  - Unlimited office visits
  - Carry case
  - Cleaning supplies, heater, .....

# Industry Speak

- Low Technology - Less than \$1000
- Middle - \$1000 - \$2500
- High Tech - more than \$2500
  
- Tell us your budget first
  
- I talked with providers who could not explain the products or the price differences

# Types of Aids

- Behind the ear
  - open fit
- Behind the ear
  - ear mold
- Completely in the canal
- In the canal
- In the ear



# Two kinds of Licenses in Texas

- Hearing aid dispenser
  - ▣ One year internship
- Audiologist
  - ▣ Advanced education – masters or doctors degree
- Know who you are dealing with – often both kinds of Licenses are in the same firm

# Places to buy an Aid

- Independent Practice
  - Strong customer service
- Hearing Aid Programming Specialists
  - Fixing problem aids
  - Specialized adjustments
- Discount Club
  - Low price
  - Good service – but with a wait
  - 90 day return policy

# Others

- VA – veterans – need must be related to a service connected disability
- Beltone stores – no member reports
- Internet – non prescription aids – occasional use

# Texas Law

- Working for you
  - 30-day free trial
- Watch for restocking fees
  - What is your throw-away \$ limit if you get an aid that doesn't meet your needs?
- Working in someone else's interest
  - No list of consumer complaints
  - A weak list of actions
  - Appears providers can move from state to state

# Additional Cost

## Batteries for Hearing Aids



\$80

- Pocket Remote
- Volume Control
- Program selection
- Off Switch

# Summary



- An expensive and complex device
- We all hear differently
- Don't buy your aids at the location where you got your first exam without shopping for other providers
- Make sure you are comfortable with the provider and the services provided

# Questions?

