

July 9, 2009 3 Consumer Reports Summary

Jack Davidson called the meeting to order at 3 PM. He introduced our speaker Suzette Fields. Suzette has an MS in Communication disorders and a BS in Speech and Hearing. She has 20 years experience in the field and is with the Legacy Hills Hearing Center. They have been here for a year. Previously she was in New Braunfels for three years, primarily working with children. She has been with an ENT clinic and worked in a hospital setting as well as having experience with the manufacturing side.

She personally sets her patients up with a professional clean and check every six months. The hearing aids typically last 3 to 5 years although she had one patient come in with 19 year old analog aids that were still working. Often the reason for changing is not that the hearing aids have worn out, but to take advantage of the new technology.

The Consumer Reports article was based on a very small sample of 12 patients in New York City and a survey of 1100 nationwide (was that the response or the total number asked – with what kind of response rate?) Also the locations of the 1100 (assuming that it was the total response), were not specified.

Selection of a provider , if you are a veteran, the VA benefits will be the least expensive way to go. They contract with a limited number of manufactures (including Phonak). Most ENT physicians have an audiologist, but how much time they allow for hearing aid patients follow up is a question that should be asked.

Independent Provider - the new standard for audiologists is a doctor of Audiology (DAuD). She has a MS plus she took a national certification exam and a state hearing aid exam. Audiologists look at a medical perspective. Hearing aid dispensers do not necessarily have the academic credentials; however they would have to pass the state hearing aid exam.

Name Brand stores : Miracle Ear and Beltone can only be bought in their stores and conversely their stores do not sell other brands.

Style is determined partly by the hearing loss and also by what the purchaser would wear. The more severe losses require two microphones and that takes up more space, and requires a larger battery. There are 4 battery sizes (10, 312, 313 and another rare one). The 10's last 5-7 days, the 312 and 313 last 10-14 days. Open fit is generally very good for people with a high frequency hearing loss. The more bulk that is in the ears the less the sound is " natural" and the more that the ear is closed off, the more wax accumulates. Heat and moisture are not good for hearing aids and August is the month that most hearing aids need repairs.

Features of Aids or features (which correlate with price) - someone with a quiet life style needs fewer bells and whistles, and someone with an active life style needs more. One big question is how well does the hearing aid handle background noise. The more features the larger the hearing aid as it will need more space. It is becoming harder to distinguish between brands. Her criterion is how well her patients do with that aid. One aid that she quit carrying because of feedback problems, but once that problem was resolved, she began carrying it again.

Does wearing aids increased or decreased hearing loss (progression)? While there is no impact (unless sounds are too loud and all aids have a limit to the loudness) for hearing tones for the brain to process the sounds properly, it is better to use hearing aids as it keeps the brain sharp. There have been people who bought one aid when they needed two. When they were later tested on speech the ear that had been wearing the aid had an 80% recognition factor and the other only a

30% recognition factor. Some of these people were not able to utilize the second aid even when they could afford it.

Evaluation , the history of noise, ear infections and military service are important. Hearing aids are expensive and need to be thought of as an investment.

Understanding your purchase , manufacturer's warranties usually are two to three years, and after expiration they generally can be extended for \$250 per year, and that includes the loss and damage coverage if not previously used. (There may be some coverage on homeowner's policies). If a repair can not be completed in-house, sending the aid out generally costs about \$275. There may be a professional service fee after the warranty expires. The trial period is generally 30 days. At Legacy Hills she extends that to whatever is necessary to fit the aid; however there is a \$150 professional service fee that is retained if money is returned to the purchaser.

She brought a model Lyric aid, which is the most expensive hearing aid on the market (\$1500 "subscription" per year per ear). It fits in the canal (much further down than the in-the-canal aids), is worn 24/7, and needs to be professionally replaced when the battery dies (they last about 82 days). It is water-resistant but not water proof (showers fine, scuba diving no). Her patients that can afford them really like them. The subscription fee covers 6 replacements per year. The meeting was adjourned at 4 PM.