

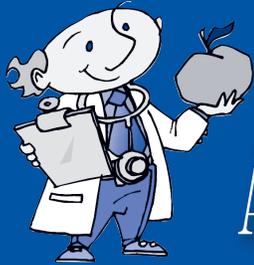
# H HEARING SERVICES & S SYSTEMS

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# “Have You Heard?”

N E W S L E T T E R  
SUMMER 2015

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## Ask Your Audiologist

**Q. What is a hearing aid selection appointment? Is this a new service? I just noticed an item on my insurance explanation of benefits for this service.**

**A.** A hearing aid selection service has been around in some form since the birth of audiology. It is the process of recommending the best hearing aids for each individual. Born in the U.S. Army, it was a rehabilitation service for World War II veterans. It was originally a residential program that required about 2 weeks of trial and error involving testing with a number of hearing aids. The veteran had the opportunity to wear different aids around the base and exchange them until the best match was found. This process continued with many revisions until around 1960 when the process that had become known as the “comparative hearing aid evaluation” largely disappeared.

Our current hearing aid selection process involves identifying products that are capable of providing suitable correction for the degree and pattern of your hearing loss. We also consider your style preference (what the aids look like), the features

that are appropriate to your listening needs (do you spend a lot of time in noisy situations; do you want to control your hearing aids with your cell phone), your ability to handle small objects, your desire to have the hearing aid be more automatic and, of course, cost. Not all hearing aids are created equal. Some are better suited to specific cases than others and most of the time there is more than 1 good option. We normally find that if we take our time sharing information with you that within about 30-60 minutes we have identified a product that is very likely to meet your expectations and hearing requirements the first time. Yet, we recognize that there are times when things don't go according to expectation. That's why all of our hearing aids have a trial period and can be exchanged for a different model or totally returned if it's really a disaster!

From time to time a patient tells us they were in another office and very quickly new hearing aids were put on them and they were sent out the door on a trial. This is not considered “best practice” and is a tactic to sell the most expensive hearing aids. We do not follow this practice. Before you leave our office wearing a new hearing aid, we will spend an additional 45-60 minutes with you on a different day fitting, programming, testing and training you with the hearing aids. Doesn't all this time add expense? Nope. It's simply time well spent up front rather than later. Who said, “There is never time to do it right but always time to do it over.”? So how do we know our process is correct? The industry average hearing aid return for credit rate is over 20%. Our return rate is 1.5%. The industry average for hearing aids that are “in the drawer” (never worn) is 12%. Our follow up surveys tell us that 99% of hearing aids we fit are worn most of the time.

And by the way, most insurance plans that cover hearing aids also cover the hearing aid selection service.

# No More Boo Moo in PLUS BLUE



In the Spring newsletter we described a complication (glitch?) in the hearing aid benefit of the Medicare Plus Blue program. This complication (snafu?) limited your choices among hearing aid options to only the basic models with no option to upgrade. We were unhappy with this complication (goof up?) and many of you were outraged. In fact, thanks to so many people voicing their concern to Plus Blue representatives, they revised their guidelines. They now state that you must be offered the option of obtaining a “standard model” hearing aid (as was always the case) but you may choose a more sophisticated model if you are willing to pay the difference (as also was always the case). That pretty much makes things the way they always have been, except for the additional paperwork that we now must maintain to document that we actually did give you the choice of a “standard model”. Your level of coverage depends on your particular plan. We are happy to call in advance of your appointment to be sure of your date of eligibility, copays, deductibles, etc.

## PRODUCT UPDATES

Got nothing new for you. Described a bunch of new stuff in the spring newsletter. Phonak V's, Starkey Z's and made for iPhone Halo BTE's, Oh MY! Most new product releases occur in the spring and fall. So, if you need product changes, come and talk to us about the 3 month old stuff.

Doesn't seem quite right not to describe any technology though. So let's mention that we have had an increase in interest in “invisible” hearing aids recently. It's been quite awhile since these were originally described in this newsletter so some of you may like to know more. The industry uses the acronym IIC or invisible-in-canal in publications and advertisements. Properly fit, the outside edge is 1/16-1/8” inside the canal. You really can not see them unless you get up close and personal to peer down into the ear canal. (That could get kind of uncomfortable for other reasons though.) Advantages of the IIC other than cosmetics include, being sheltered from the wind, more protected from outside moisture and generally works well with a telephone or stethoscope. “Hmmm,” you say, “there must be a downside.” Well of course there is, like everything! How about if we give you 5? 1. They are tricky to fit comfortably. The ear gets mighty sensitive if the fit isn't perfect. 2. There are some ears that are too itty bitty for this itty bitty hearing aid. 3. The itty bitty hearing aid takes an itty bitty battery that will last about 3 days. 4. The itty bitty hearing aid does not have room for a large processor. That means some of the advanced noise reduction capabilities available in larger hearing aids aren't an option on these. On the upside of this downside, using a less sophisticated processor is less expensive. 5. They can make your own voice sound hollow, although the newer designs have been greatly improved in this regard. So, what about the price, you ask. Is this itty bitty hearing aid going to cost really big dollars? The price is pretty much the same as any other hearing aid. The sophistication of the processor is the biggest determiner of price. Prices range from \$1500-2800. Available from Starkey and Phonak.



# EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL HEARING AIDS



You may find this hard to believe but it's been over 20 years since the digital hearing aid became commercially available. That really seems like the dark ages with all the technology changes that have occurred since then. The first generation digital hearing aids were monstrous in size. This was due to the lack of miniaturization of the day and the need for large batteries that could last more than a few hours. Those hearing aids failed horribly! Consumers weren't having anything to do with those behemoths when they could choose a tiny "completely in canal" hearing aid like President Clinton was wearing.

For the next 5-10 years, manufacturer's produced digitally programmable analog hearing aids. That's a fancy way of saying the audiologist adjusted the settings in these instruments with a computer but they really were similar to other analog aids. They really did work well though. Around the year 2000, fully digital hearing aids had become small enough and energy efficient enough for clinical use. They were horrible little things. The sound quality was bad and they took us 3 times as many appointments to get them programmed. About that time one of our all-time favorite manufacturers (Danavox) was purchased by GN Resound. GN decided the time had come to totally eliminate their line of non-digital hearing aids. We decided the time had come

to eliminate GN Resound! Those aids were definitely not ready for prime time!

Over the next few years the quality of digital aids improved. Around 2002 we began using them selectively with positive results. (A few of them are actually still in use.) However, they cost about double the price of non-digital products. We continued to use analog aids extensively along with digital aids until about 2005. (We often referred to ourselves as the last practice in the U.S. still fitting analog aids.) By this time digital aids were much easier to program correctly, they were as small as analog aids, they were much better with battery consumption and they provided features that the analog hearing aid could not. And that, folks, was pretty much the end of the analog aid. Digital hearing aids have continued to improve. They have become much more automatic so wearers rarely need to adjust them. Feedback (squeal) is almost a thing of the past. They can self adjust for noise, wind or other intrusions. Price has come down. A digital hearing aid in 2002 cost over \$2000. Today, an aid with the same features would cost about 1/3-1/2 less! The high end digital aids with more advanced features are more expensive but there is a very wide range of costs. Which brings us back to the importance of the hearing aid selection process discussed on page 1 for finding the right match for your needs. (Clever segue, don't you think?)

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