

Trans disciplinary Approach to Patient Centered Hearing Health

Opinion

As a hearing instrument specialist, I serve as the first line of defense for hearing health. Providing free consultations, hearing screens, diagnostic exams and video otoscopy, while answering many questions along the route. During many appointments, it's unearthed that many people rarely think of their hearing let alone the quality of their auditory system. It seems the old adage of "never put anything bigger than elbow in your ear" and simple screenings during elementary years sums up the general unanimity of hearing health. Why is there such a lack of knowledge of hearing health and best practices within the average person? There also exists, dare I say, an imbalance in the flow of care where continual quality care is nonexistent and situational care (when something arises and causes a person to receive isolated treatment) runs rampant. This phenomenon leaves me asking why?

According to the National Institute of Health, only 16% of those whom could benefit from hearing aids actually have hearing aids. This figure is astonishing and prompts the question why are people not utilizing hearing aids? Could the answer be: cost, fear, uncertainty, ineffectiveness of the device, lack of knowledge of options? In well-developed countries, such as America, the extremely high prevalence of hearing loss is none other than a health epidemic.

A transdisciplinary team approach is the best solution to the issue at hand. It dismantles any hierarchal archetype; it causes a level playing field amongst professionals who are involved with co-treating and evaluating the patient, putting the patient's interest first. The collaboration between General Physicians, Otolaryngologist and Audiological experts results in integrated healthcare to patients and families. It broadens the current spectrum of populations and clinical setting targeted. This is considered the holistic approach to child development; there are benefits in educating the general population of hearing health as well.

A thorough diagnostic hearing evaluation could yield not only multiple tests, but often involves multiple disciplines. Therefore, by coming together and sharing our professional expertise, we can provide in amazing consultation and treatment plan for the patient. As stated by authors Paul and Whitelaw "In addition,

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results of audiologic evaluation help to direct the diagnosis of hearing loss, to make appropriate referrals, and to guide treatment and management decisions."

Collaboration is essential for this approach to work, and coordination is key to the success amongst all the health professionals involved. While providing resources and educating the public, we dismantle myths and ultimately foster a culture where hearing is regarded a necessity, and not a luxury or option. This approach would help decrease the alarming number of "easily correctable" hearing deficits that we face each day.

A transdisciplinary approach to hearing will promulgate hearing knowledge and hearing care to a broader population. By synthesis of expertise, with unique but relevant disciplines, we able to provide each patient with a more robust and effective appointment, focusing on greater hearing health targets. This approach broadens the skills of each professional involved, perpetuating one common goal of hearing education. This collaborative approach to hearing fosters a win-win-win, scenario. By working together, we further sharpen our own skills; removing traditional scope of practice boundaries and thus broadening our own profession. Ultimately the patient wins by having individualized services and reinforcement of hearing care from various discipline methodologies. As human being, we long for communication and validation; without hearing this is not achieved. What is life without communication, hearing those in our world? Quality hearing is essential to the development and utilization of communication in all facets of life and the absence of hearing are detrimental to those same facets.