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From the Executive Director's Desk

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Knowing the Gold Standard of Care

Recently I heard the statement “hearing aids are just electronic devices.” Well yes they are electronic devices but not “just” as in merely. Being fit with appropriate hearing aids is the first step in adjusting to hearing loss and an important component of rehabilitation for a lost sense. As long as hearing aids do not give 20/20 hearing, the device will have to be coupled with advice and counseling informed by a thorough evaluation of functioning and lifestyle by a qualified hearing health professional. Walking out of the hearing healthcare professional’s office with an instruction booklet is not going to cut it.

If they are electronic devices then they become discretionary items. HLAA strongly believes that hearing aids are not discretionary items but rather are medical necessities that are a key part of rehabilitating a loss of hearing.

In my former life as a physical therapist I treated patients with amputated limbs and there are parallels that I see. The prosthesis was a key to rehabilitating someone’s ability to walk but it had to be coupled with so much more—mechanics, troubleshooting, muscle strengthening, balance and gait training, skin care, adaptation to the new leg, navigating the world of uneven surfaces and getting back to favorite pastimes and sports, not to mention the psychosocial adaptation to losing the limb, the stigma effect and the family dynamics. I see many similarities between learning to use and accept a prosthetic limb and learning to use and accept a hearing aid.

As a consumer organization we must take responsibility to ensure that people with hearing loss know what to expect when they are evaluated and fit with hearing aids. They should know what the “gold standard” of care is, how to recognize it and whether or not that standard is being met.

Toward that end we have developed a checklist for consumers to take with them to their hearing healthcare appointment—a crib sheet to know what to look for and keep track of with simple checks—yes or no. Go to page 23, tear it out, or copy it for future use. It is also available on our website at www.hearingloss.org.

And be sure to follow the instructions to send us copies so that we can keep track of how well you are being served. ■■■

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Step Up for People with Hearing Loss

Go to www.hearingloss.org to find a Walk4Hearing™ location near you. There are plenty of opportunities to walk, form teams (family, friends or company teams), raise money for your organization as an Alliance Group, or help out on walk day. Be part of the excitement and raise awareness and money for hearing loss programs and to eradicate the stigma of hearing loss.