



BARBARA BURTON

I am treated by medical professionals in a number of departments and clinics at a medical facility in Houston. Now that our lives are ruled by a pandemic and the number of times I need to go to Houston has dropped, I receive some of my care via telehealth.

I have had good luck with many such appointments. But just as in face-to-face encounters, the success of telehealth is often dependent on factors I cannot control.

The first is the pitch of the speaker's voice. Next is the speed at which they talk. Clarity is an issue if the speaker mumbles or has odd vocal tics or keeps moving away from the microphone. Last, but extremely important is whether the speaker has a heavy accent. Speechreading is really no help at all in those situations.

Recently I was assigned to yet another department. I did not realize that the first half hour of the appointment would be spent talking with a nurse who wanted a lot of background information. The nurse had a very strong accent and I had to keep asking her to repeat herself. She got a little frustrated with me and suggested that I just turn up the volume. I had to explain that turning up the volume is not always a solution. Then I offhandedly remarked "and that's why we need captions!" She really didn't understand.

Later that day I contacted the Patient Advocacy office and asked for an ADA accommodation. When a woman from that office called me back, I asked for the medical center to provide captions for telehealth meetings. We shall see what happens.

Barbara Burton's hearing began to deteriorate when she was in her 40's and she has worn bilateral hearing aids ever since. She joined HLAA in 1996 and was instrumental in starting the HLAA SW Ohio chapter, making it possible for many more people to benefit from HLAA's resources.