

By Brenda Battat



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From the Executive Director's Desk

An Unprecedented Response from the Hearing Health Care Industry

Last fall the HCAA Board decided to not join the industry trade and professional organizations in opposing *bi HealthInnovations*TM and other new entrants into the hearing health care marketplace. That decision was based on the simple premise that the marketplace needs expanded options for delivery of hearing health care services in order to expand access for consumers with hearing loss. The fact is clear that only a tiny portion of the millions of people with hearing loss get hearing aids and associated services.

In the face of strident opposition from audiologists, hearing aid specialists and hearing aid manufacturers, HCAA stood firm in its position on behalf of consumers to open up the hearing health care delivery system.

Meanwhile, HCAA management made an effort to keep the dialogue open with audiology and hearing aid specialist organizations and hearing aid manufacturers in the belief that they should be leading and shaping the direction of the future of hearing health care and welcoming new approaches for consumers rather than snuffing out attempts by entrepreneurs enticed by the potential market.

It was therefore extremely encouraging to receive an unprecedented joint communiqué from the Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), the American Academy of Audiology (Academy) and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). These organizations delivered a statement focusing on consumer needs in the delivery models of hearing health care and recognizing the changing face of the hearing health care environment.

The communiqué can be found on page 7. HCAA then issued a news release in response applauding their statement. You can read the HCAA response at <http://hearingloss.org/content/consumer-driven-hearing-health-care/>

This is a small start, a crack opening the door to what should be a period of deep transition in the industry. Increasing numbers of people with hearing loss, important new research linking hearing loss with other health issues, exciting advances in technology, new entrants cutting prices without compromising quality and audiology organizations opening up to itemization of services and different ways of delivering services, all point to effecting much needed change in hearing health care. **HCAA**

Brenda Battat is executive director of HCAA and can be reached at battat@hearingloss.org.

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Happy Holidays to Our Members

All the Best for the New Year

from the HCAA Board of Trustees and National Office Staff



Communiqué from Three Organizations about the Delivery of Hearing Health Care Services



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION



AMERICAN
ACADEMY OF
AUDIOLOGY



August 16, 2012

Dear Colleague:

There have been many changes in the delivery of hearing health care services over the past few years. Patients are demanding more transparency; they are questioning the cost of hearing aids and the services provided and may be coming to your practice with a device purchased over-the-counter or through the Internet. We believe that this is a trend that is not going to go away. As we all know and have discussed over the past several years, it is time to take a critical look at our current service (and product) delivery models and decide what changes need to occur to secure our professional future and to ensure continued and increased access to consumers who need the care we provide.

Changes are all around us. The federal government, through the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), is funding innovative research to improve accessibility and affordability of hearing health care services, including the development of low-cost technologies and innovative delivery systems. The Department of Veterans Affairs is piloting teleaudiology, and manufacturers of hearing aids are developing software and cell phone applications to assist consumers (and non-audiologist providers) in programming hearing aids remotely.

Meanwhile, others in the industry are creating direct-to-consumer business models to market their products. Some insurance companies are trying to develop their own models for delivery of hearing health care just as they have done for other types of health care. The entrance of insurance companies into the field of hearing health care and the hearing aid delivery system creates a truly unique dynamic, given that they have the infrastructure (resources and access to millions of subscribers) that may enable them to negotiate lower rates on hearing aids, create direct-to-consumer delivery models, and develop networks that may or may not include audiologists.

Consumers have complained that hearing aid cost and current service delivery models are barriers to accessing hearing health care. Insurance companies argue that the shortage of audiologists to meet subscribers' needs justifies their entry into this area of health care. We firmly believe that audiologist-directed hearing health care can be the solution to more effective and efficient service delivery. It is incumbent upon us to establish audiologist-driven, patient-centric models that effectively address the challenges of greater access to effective and affordable hearing health care—otherwise, we risk our services being minimized in the hearing health care delivery system of the future.

What is the audiology community willing to do to help meet the hearing health needs of consumers? We urge you to consider how your individual practice may be impacted by the paradigm shift to consumer-driven health care. We understand and support the concept that each practice is unique and that business decisions should be made by each audiologist based on specific needs. And we believe that all audiologists should understand the changing climate and review their current practice models for sustainability.

The following questions/suggestions may help you gauge how well your practice model aligns with new hearing health care paradigms and determine if adjustments are needed.

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- What role does the sale of hearing aids play in your practice model? Do you have options in place to accommodate consumers who arrive at your practice with a hearing aid purchased elsewhere?
- Are the costs associated with the care you provide transparent to the patient? If appropriate, do you itemize the cost of your services? When discussing amplification and other treatment, do you offer patients options? Do you engage family and others to support the patient with hearing loss?
- Do you charge your patients appropriately for the products and services that you provide? Are you familiar with policies of competitive entities in your immediate locale? Are your services clearly defined and valued in your contracts with payer groups?
- Do you provide treatment for hearing loss that reflects the full scope of practice for audiology? Do you provide information on hearing assistive technology, listening training, and counseling—all of which could expand and enhance the service delivery model for your patients?
- Do you use or have you considered employing audiology assistants to provide appropriate care under your supervision, thereby enabling you to expand professional services for your patients?
- How do you plan to engage consumers in your local area to facilitate and enhance access to your services?
- Do you employ established best practices (verification, counseling, etc.) to ensure and improve patient outcomes? Do you measure patient satisfaction?
- Are you aware of your professional code of ethics, state licensure rules, and legal and regulatory guidelines that impact your specific practice setting (e.g., anti-trust policy, correct coding and billing practices)?

The following resources are available to help you navigate this paradigm shift.

- **Practice Considerations for Dispensing Audiologists**

www.asha.org/aud/Practice-Considerations-for-Dispensing-Audiologists

- **Resources for Practitioners**

www.audiologist.org/practice-considerations

- **Guide to Itemizing Your Professional Services**

www.audiology.org/practice/reimbursement/Documents/20120110_AAA_Guide_Itemizing_Prof_Serv.pdf

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, American Academy of Audiology, and Academy of Doctors of Audiology continue to work collaboratively on additional materials to help audiologists navigate the new era of hearing health care delivery. If you have specific questions or have information you would like to share, we urge you to reach out to your respective organizations:

- **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

Contact: Pam Mason at pmason@asha.org

- **American Academy of Audiology**

Contact: Melissa Sinden at msinden@audiology.org

- **Academy of Doctors of Audiology**

Contact: Stephanie Czuhajewski at sczuhajewski@audiologist.org

Sincerely,

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

American Academy of Audiology

Academy of Doctors of Audiology