

In a Perfect World



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HLAA's executive director paints a picture of a perfect future for people with hearing loss and why HLAA is poised to make it happen.

At HLAA Convention 2014 in Austin this past June, we announced HLAA's public policy agenda, talked extensively about the Consumer Technology Initiative and our desire to make HLAA a household name through a comprehensive and strategic marketing and membership campaign. We also discussed a new membership model that is being piloted in our New York City and Sarasota Chapters. We are thinking about our future and what we want it to be.

Composer Richard Einhorn was our keynote speaker who shared his challenges with hearing loss. He said technology is both his friend and his enemy while he talked about how difficult it is to maneuver through the complex world of hearing health care.

I thought I would use Richard as an illustration of what the future could hold for the millions of other people who can live, and are living, successfully with hearing loss. In a perfect world, there would be total prevention or an immediate cure for hearing loss, but that seems a long way in the future. I believe, however, that there is another future that is realistic and attainable and one that HLAA is poised to make happen.

Richard's Perfect World Story... Sometime in the Future

The future shows him as CEO of Einhorn Better Hearing Technology Company, a company billed as one who "provides better hearing solutions to everyone across the globe."

Richard feels accomplished because his company markets a "total communication" device that allows seamless wireless transmission of sound from a smart phone (used as the hub) to a hearing aid, all programmable via multiple apps. He personally used the system and adjusts his hearing aid in response to different listening situations. It can also be used for hearing protection. It can alert him about public emergencies, such as tornado warnings,

or be used to locate a place of worship in his neighborhood that is hearing looped, or find a captioned movie near his office.

Although Richard's company was among the first, many other companies saw the opportunity and quickly followed. After all, with 48 million people in the U.S. who have a hearing loss, it was easy for companies to understand how critical it was to get to the market. The good news for consumers is that we are able to use multiple devices to effectively and efficiently communicate with each other, regardless of manufacturer.

In this perfect future, universal wireless standards for hearing loss allows for devices from one manufacturer to work seamlessly with other devices. The cell phone that you can buy at an electronics store works seamlessly with any brand of hearing aid or cochlear implant and either can be used to hear the audio track from any TV, tablet, phone or other device thanks to built-in universal wireless transmission. You can use the mic on the phone as a listening device for your hearing aid too.

The Futuristic Total Communication Device

In the perfect future, Richard uses his communication device to get directions to his new doctor's office on his way to work. He's having his annual physical and knows that in addition to having his blood pressure and other vitals checked, a routine hearing test is part of the exam. Insurance companies now recognize that hearing is critical to all aspects of healthy living, so hearing aids, osseointegrated devices, cochlear implants, and aural rehabilitation after hearing aid fittings or cochlear implant surgeries, are covered by most insurance plans—even Medicare.

Amanda Smith is one of Richard's employees who wears a hearing aid in one ear and a cochlear implant

in the other. She is pleased that her smart phone, finally, along with all her other listening technologies are totally seamless in how they work and perform. Amanda enjoys live theater and through advanced wireless technology specially designed for hearing accessibility, she can clearly hear all the dialogue from the stage.

One of Amanda's job responsibilities is to bring consumers together to provide input into the design of emerging products at the research and development stage. She is delighted that Hearing Loss Association of America, the leading consumer organization, is able to provide her and other companies with insightful and helpful perspectives from consumers so that products are now developed with the end user in mind. This means more and better products are entering the marketplace every day.

It is probably noteworthy to point out some of the changes in the workplace that have been a great help to Richard, Amanda, and others so they can be successful in their jobs. There is technology with detection circuitry that automatically adjusts microphones for directionality and reduces ambient noise, not only for participants in the room but also for people using cell phones (lowering background noise from streets and cars). The other improvement is instantaneous and accurate speech-to-text so that people with profound hearing loss can better participate in meetings. Needless to say all the conference rooms have a hearing induction loop installed and working.

At the end of the day, Richard and Amanda go to their respective homes to relax and watch some TV. Things have changed there as well. When watching TV, a mechanism automatically shuts off the hearing aid's mic so that sound comes directly from the TV loop. However, if Richard's wife or daughter has a comment about the show, or needs to ask Richard to take out the trash, the mic instantly turns on so that he can hear and immediately proceed to the curb!

In a Perfect World, More Technology, Less Stigma

As technology has developed and exploded in the marketplace, it has become clear that everyone wants to hear well, and as more people embrace hearing better with improved technology and better listening strategies, hearing loss has lost its stigma.

Better hearing has become a critical factor in everyone's daily living to the point that noise levels are now a critical factor in identifying healthy communities—places where people want to live. It is not uncommon for restaurants and public venues to advertise the noise volume in their facilities as a way to encourage people to come to their businesses; induction loops are common.

How Does this Future Become a Reality?

I've just described the perfect future. Is it unrealistic? Impossible? I don't think so.

I am reminded of the old TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man* when the opening narration says,

"We can rebuild him. We have the technology. We can make him better than he was."

I think the technology and the science are here—the question of us is do we have the power to build the future that I have outlined? I think we do but it won't be easy and won't happen overnight. Standing on the shoulders of 48 million people in this country, engaging with industry and other new partners—we do have the power to create the kind of future we want.

HLAA is committed to achieving this future—we are the only organization focused solely on the needs of consumers with hearing loss and we believe we are the best organization striving to achieve this future. With your help, your input and your quest to hear better and live successfully with hearing loss, we can and, will do it! **HLM**

Anna Gilmore Hall is executive director and celebrated her one-year anniversary with HLAA this past July. She can be reached at agilmorehall@hearingloss.org.

Dear Abby Recommends HLAA on Monday, June 9, 2014

Dear Abby's syndicated column published HLAA Executive Director Anna Gilmore Hall's letter in response to someone who was "mortified at the dinner table" about her in-law's poor hearing. In addition, Abby suggested that people go to www.hearingloss.org for help and information.

Dear Abby's column runs in 1,400 newspapers around the country as well as on the Internet. HLAA staff did a great job in preparing for the anticipated response and creating a special page on the website for people who followed Dear Abby's recommendation.

The response was formidable and we received many calls and emails for information as well as many new members. HLAA Chapters also got requests for local information.

The good news from this recommendation is that people looking for help with their hearing loss found it. Thank you, Dear Abby!



Dear Abby