

# A Consumer's Perspective

By Ann Liming

**W**hen I learned that I was a candidate for a cochlear implant, I was both happy and relieved. I had not qualified for an implant in the past based on criteria established by Medicare. When my audiologist asked if I would like to participate in a research project to explore whether Medicare candidacy criteria should match that of most other insurance plans thereby allowing for earlier implantation, I thought, 'why not'?

Most people who embark on a path to learn if a cochlear implant is the right choice for them conduct some level of research including talking with and observing people who have traveled this same path before them. Even then it is hard to imagine how an implant will impact your own hearing. There is no way to describe the joy of hearing all of the notes played by my musical clock for the first time and being able to identify the tune.

I smile when I am reminded that the teakettle whistles and that I can hear when I leave the water running in the sink. Both my friends and I are more relaxed when they do not have to work so hard to include me in conversations or repeat what I have missed. I am much more confident now dealing with sales clerks or placing an order at a fast food restaurant.

While I do not feel like an older person, my chronological age places me in the middle-old-age population. There is an abundance of research supporting the negative impact of hearing loss on older people. It is a major loss to a family network or community at large when older people isolate themselves because they can no

longer hear conversations and sounds around them well. Hearing loss can lead to life threatening situations when a person does not hear information. Loneliness, isolation and frustration can take a toll on one's physical health. Recent research shows a possible link between hearing loss and dementia. The cost to family caregivers and society is staggering. It makes sense to implant people while they are still in the young-old-age group and while they have greater capacity to adapt to this new way of hearing.

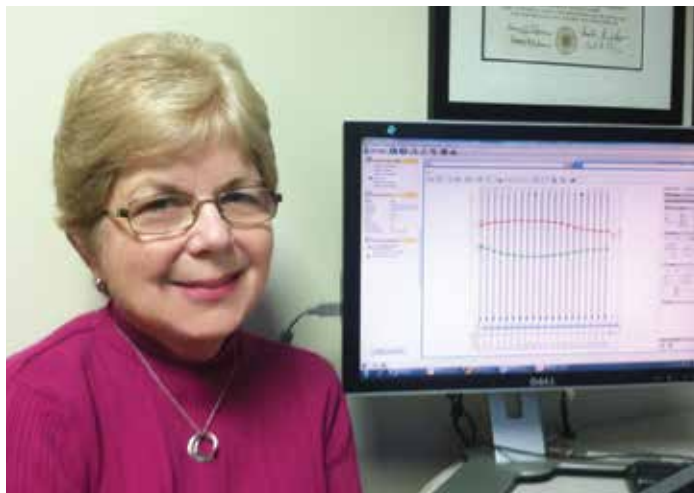
Having now reaped some of the joys of hearing better (and I am sure there are many more to come), my response to the invitation to participate in this study has gone from 'why not' to 'absolutely'! I am thankful for the wisdom, commitment and passion of the professionals in ACI Alliance to take on this research study. As a consumer, it is a privilege to share in important collaborative opportunities provided by ACI Alliance. It is empowering to work alongside professionals to advance

access to cochlear implantation. It gives me goose bumps to envision the improved quality of life for older individuals with hearing loss, who with a cochlear implant, can enjoy their older years and continue to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Based on the sounds and conversations that I now hear in only three months since my CI was activated, my participation in this study has taken on new meaning and new life. I would like for all people receiving Medicare who choose a CI as their path to follow, to be able to do so early in their senior years so they can stay connected to people and their communities. **HLM**

*Ann Liming is an HCAA member, former Board of Trustees president, and consumer advocate from Lansing, Michigan.*

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