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The Statistic in the Room

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There were six of us in the room—all moms who were doing a volunteer project for the school. We were getting to know each other and someone asked me what I did. It's amazing how when I mention Hearing Loss Association of America, the stories of hearing loss come out.

With 48 million people in the U.S. having hearing loss—that's roughly one in seven—someone usually has an experience with hearing loss. But this time the statistic in the room was more staggering than the national average. Two people had close encounters with hearing loss and were willing to talk about it.

Julie's husband has Ménière's disease, an inner ear disorder causing dizziness, tinnitus and fluctuating hearing loss. She said he has lost a lot of hearing in one ear, so I asked her if he wore a hearing aid. "No!" Julie said in exasperation and with a look that said she wished he would.

Carmen's daughter, age seven, was diagnosed with a hearing loss when she was four. She passed her newborn hearing screening but somehow they later noticed she wasn't hearing well. They found out she has a malformed ear, resulting in hearing loss and tinnitus. I asked Carmen if she wears hearing aids. She said, "No, she said she didn't want to wear 'those things' in her ear." I asked how she was doing in school. Carmen said she was doing very well so she didn't see any urgency to get hearing aids. I tried to be encouraging and say how little girls like to decorate their hearing aids with bling...and I slipped in a little advice by saying you really don't know what she's not hearing.

So, that day, the folks in the room beat the odds of one in seven having some degree of hearing loss. That day, it was two in six!

The other staggering statistic is that 86 percent of people who could

benefit from hearing aids don't wear them. Our small group surpassed the stat again. Assuming both of the aforementioned could use hearing aids, we scored 100 percent of people (in the room) who might benefit from hearing aids but didn't wear them.

Looking Beyond the Numbers

Those of you reading this are probably not the ones we need to reach. I would guess that most of you have done something about your hearing loss—had it tested, got fitted for hearing aids, got cochlear implants or use assistive devices. You are trying your best to stay in the hearing world by using any kind of technology that will help you do so. You might be successful and doing well or you might be struggling, but you are hanging in there, even if by a thread.

People aren't just numbers. We know that hearing loss is a major health concern and can lead to other issues such as learning problems for children, workplace struggles, isolation, depression, falls and maybe even dementia.

It takes five to seven years from the time someone realizes he or she has a hearing loss until they get help. Why? There are so many reasons. Some practical, like cost, and some very personal, like not wanting to be seen wearing hearing aids for fear of looking old, less capable if you're in the workplace, or being teased if you are a child.

What Can Be Done About It?

Since 1979, HLAA has worked to bring attention to hearing loss and its adverse effects. Finally, with the help of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NAS) and its study, hearing loss has captured the attention of the nation. HLAA was the only consumer-group sponsor of the study and subsequent report on affordable and

accessible hearing health care, which was released last June.

One of the recommendations of the NAS report was for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to open a new category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing wearable devices for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. Following that recommendation, Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) have recently led the introduction of the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017.

This legislation would make hearing aids available over the counter for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. They could also be for people who might not otherwise go to a hearing health care professional for testing and fitting. I am not saying the two people I talked about could benefit or qualify (certainly not the child!), but why not make that option available?

The hope is that people who aren't seeking help might if it's easy and affordable. It might be a first step for many who would then seek continued attention from an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist. Let's get this 86 percent in the door and maybe the idea of wearing "those things" might not be so oppressive, but rather liberating and helpful. Then, with

additional studies, maybe we will have some new statistics to look at.

An OTC hearing aid doesn't solve all the problems; it's one step. But we have a window of opportunity right now. Many HLAA members would not benefit from an OTC product and have enjoyed the good, continued care of their hearing health care professionals. But if you had such an option when you first began to lose your hearing, would you have done something sooner?

We don't know how this will all work out, but HLAA is actively working on initiatives such as OTC hearing aids to make hearing health care more affordable and accessible to everyone. Read Dr. Frank Lin's article on page 18 and Lise Hamlin's Action Alert on page 24 for a more detailed explanation and to find out how you can help.

We know you need insurance coverage and Medicare coverage for hearing aids, so let's ride this wave that hearing health care is on right now and keep it going. HLAA has a lot of work to do beyond OTC hearing aids.

I value your membership in HLAA. We need you now more than ever and will keep bringing you news from the HLAA home front here in the nation's capital. *HLM*

Message from the Executive Director

You will soon be receiving a letter from me in the mail regarding our annual Spring Appeal. In that you will learn how HLAA has a seat at the table whenever people with hearing loss are considered. And our involvement is more important now than ever as there are historic changes on the horizon for people with hearing loss.

HLAA is the most highly-respected organization representing consumers—that's you. We never forget that our ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of people with hearing loss. We have made great strides, but in some ways the work is just beginning.

As a self-supporting nonprofit organization, your continued support is critical to helping us achieve our goals. Please read the letter and consider a tax-deductible donation.

HLAA extends our deep appreciation to our incredible donors for supporting our mission.

With sincere gratitude,



Barbara Kelley
Executive Director

P.S. You can also make a donation online at hearingloss.org!

Online Learning

Registration is open for the HLAA Hearing Loss Support Specialist Training (HLSST)

HLSST is an online, self-paced training program which provides core knowledge for individuals who work with people with hearing loss. The training consists of four classes with as many as fourteen lessons in each class. Lessons are composed of multiple readings and captioned videos.

The classes are:

- Class I: Hearing Loss: The Basics
- Class II: Coping with Hearing Loss
- Class III: Hearing Assistive Technology and Services
- Class IV: Advocacy, Resources and the Law

You may register for one class at a time or register for the entire program at once for the discounted price of \$225. For complete details, table of contents, and registration information, visit hearingloss.org/content/hlsst. Questions? Email Nancy Macklin at nmacklin@hearingloss.org.