



## SHARON THURSTON

When I fell off my bike and fractured my ankle in three places, I embarked on a two-year health care odyssey compounded by hearing loss.

I knew the break was serious by the X-ray technicians' faces, but I was overwhelmed and couldn't take in their words. Later, when surgery failed and my ankle did not heal correctly, grasping every word became very important. I faced crucial decisions that would impact the rest of my life. Should surgeons redo the metal plates and screws? Internet research and stories raised so many questions. If they fused my ankle, could I ever drive again? I live alone, so this really mattered. What about pain, ankle braces, normal shoes and sandy beaches? Would ankle replacement be better?

My wonderful orthopedic surgeon explained various scenarios in a complex discussion on ligaments, flexion, arthritis and syndesmosis, which is a slightly moveable fibrous joint. I learned a lot, yet even with life-changing cochlear implants, about 20% of words remain unclear. At times, he turned away toward the X-rays, which made it even more difficult to hear him. Sometimes my confusion led him to speak directly to my sister, who had accompanied me. My sister Andrea also has hearing loss. She followed along using a speech-to-text app and sent me a transcript the next day. Amazingly, it filled in so many blanks. On the next visit, she lost the transcript and I felt bewildered again. Consequently, I learned to use speech-to-text apps myself. I felt better informed and in control.

*Sharon Thurston is retired from her career in library sciences, in which she worked as an IT professional. Her sister Andrea has created a website that educates and supports people with hearing loss and provides a rich storehouse of information about hearing assistive technology*