

- **Communication Issues Related to Hearing Loss**

- **Or**

- **Have a Happy Holiday Season!**

- **Samuel Trychin, Ph.D.**

# The Basis Human Connections

- ***Social communication:*** How hearing loss affects interactions between people.
- ***Physical environment communication:*** How hearing loss affects receiving important environmental information.
- ***Physiological communication:*** How hearing loss affects functioning within and between the various physiological systems that form the human body. .

# Social Communication

- If you look for hearing loss in the Public Health Census, it appears under the category of *Communication Disorders*.
- For most of us who have hearing loss, that is often our major concern, i.e., difficulty understanding what others are saying.

# Social Communication

- What we often don't consider is that, as a communication disorder, hearing loss affects everyone in the communication situation.
- When my wife speaks to me and I don't understand what she is saying, I have a problem. But, so does she.
- Really, hearing loss is *our* problem, not just *my* problem.

# Social Communication

- It is imperative to view hearing loss as an interactive problem because:
  - a. Both the person speaking and the person listening contribute to communication breakdowns, and
  - b. The cooperation of both sides is necessary for preventing or reducing communication hassles.

## Holidays are just around the corner

- Family gatherings at holidays are difficult for many people who have hearing loss because they have difficulty understanding what is being said.
- Family gatherings can also be difficult for family members of people who have hearing loss because they *don't know* what to do to be understood or have *difficulty remembering* to do it.

# Eight Key Strategies and Tactics

- 1. Write letters/notes ahead.
- 2. Place *what-to-do* signs around the house.
- 3. Wear a T-shirt with communication guidelines.
- 4. Make appointments with individual family members to *catch up*.
- 5. Anticipate difficulties and plan strategies.
- 6. Practice relaxation tactics before and during the event.
- 7. Use assistive listening devices and systems
- 8. Smile a lot.

# Physical environment communication

- Survival depends on our ability to stay in tune with the physical environment in which we live.
- We are born with a variety of sensory receptors— hearing, smell, taste, touch, and vision that provide essential information about significant environmental events.
- In some respects, hearing is the most basic and important of all our sensory capacities.

# Physical environment communication

- The speed of incoming messages reaching important processing centers in our brain is thousands of time faster than that of vision, taste, smell, and touch.
- Hearing keeps us in tune with the environment around us twenty four hours a day—even when we sleep.
- Hearing provides information about events occurring in the distance, even when it occurs around corners or behind us.

# Physical environment communication

- It is likely that the disconnect from the constant stream of environmental information, much of which occurs below the level of conscious awareness, contributes to an elevated level of tension/anxiety in a person who has hearing loss.
- The concern about this disconnect can also produce an elevated level of tension/anxiety in caring partners, e.g., a spouse, parent, or child.

# Six Key Strategies and Tactics

- 1. Use assistive listening equipment—hearing aids, cochlear implants, FMs, personal amplifiers, infra-red devices, and induction loops.
- 2. Use assistive alerting devices—visual and tactual aids.
- 3. Practice mindfulness/relaxation strategies to increase attention/alertness to external events.
- 4. Fine-tune your visual capacities, practice visual attention to environmental events
- 5. Anticipate significant environmental changes and plan what you can and will do.
- 6. Get enough sleep, sufficient exercise, and proper diet to increase your overall alertness.

# Physiological communication

- Social and/or environmental communication problems can produce elevated levels of *emotional arousal* often manifested as anxiety/fear or irritation/anger.
- When communication difficulties are frequent or cause significant damage to important relationships, e.g., at home or work, they can result in *emotional depletion*, sometimes manifested as depression.

# Physiological communication

- Anger, anxiety, depression are all associated with changes in the body and mental processes that decrease normal functioning, resulting, in chronic cases, in damage to health and adversely affecting the overall sense of well-being.
- The unpleasant body sensations associated with negative emotional arousal can induce the sufferer to avoid or escape from situations that arouse these sensations.

# Social Pain

- Some people who have hearing loss deal with the unpleasant body sensations and negative feelings resulting from communication hassles by avoiding social situations.
- That strategy works in the short-run by preventing the embarrassment/shame associated with failure to understand or the misunderstandings related to hearing loss.
- In the long run, however, that strategy leads to loneliness, depression, and increased morbidity and early mortality.

## Avoiding family gatherings at holidays?

- There will be too many people who have hearing loss and/or their communication partners who choose to avoid going to family gatherings during the upcoming holidays.
- They will avoid going to these events, not because hearing loss is present, but because they don't know what to do to prevent or reduce hearing loss produced communication problems while there.

# Seven Key Strategies and Tactics

- 1. Learn to identify the causes of communication problems.
- 2. Learn and practice the communication guidelines for preventing or reducing communication problems.
- 3. Identify and change any of your unhelpful reactions to communication problems.
- 4. Learn to model the communication behavior you desire from others.
- 5. Learn and practice techniques for increasing your awareness of your physical and psychological reactions to this kind of stress.
- 6. Learn and practice techniques for changing your physical and psychological reactions to this kind of stress.
- 7. Use some of the tactics and strategies for enjoying holiday gatherings presented previously in this webinar.

## Finally

- That is why, in my work ([trychin.com](http://trychin.com)), I focus on two aspects of coping with hearing loss:
  - 1. *Learning to manage communication situations, and*
  - 2. *Learning to manage oneself* (by reducing negative emotional arousal in difficult situations).