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“She keeps turning her head.” Those were the first words I remember hearing after a pickup truck crashed into me while riding my bicycle. Prior to the ambulance’s arrival, a medically trained bystander was performing a spinal injury assessment.

Having progressive hearing loss since a preschooler, once again, I was on my own. My first thought was “I can’t bluff.” I responded that I was instinctively turning my head to lipread because of hearing loss.

The most concerning injury was a type VI tibial plateau fracture, requiring surgery.

Healthcare professionals are caring and knowledgeable, but often do not understand hearing loss. Even with hearing loss noted in my chart, no one inquired whether they were speaking clearly or described how their specialty managed hearing loss needs.

During my hospital stay, I was proactive. I wore my hearing aids 24/7, declined most pain medications to stay alert, and initiated questions. For example, “For the proposed antibiotic, are there hearing loss side effects?” “For surgery, when will I remove my hearing aids?”)

However, during surgery, the anesthesiologist’s speech was totally unintelligible. Also, I wonder if there was a communication misunderstanding resulting in an early discharge decision.

Since I was tense about communication, I was hyper-attentive to all sounds and became mentally and physically exhausted. I tried not to worry that I might not walk normally again, internalized my emotions, and became numb. How was my communication burden intertwined in the trauma and healing?

Happily, good news. (Last year, I walked a total of 920+ miles. Yay!) That’s what comes with good medical care, following medical advice, my on-going strengthening and conditioning work, and maintaining my efforts toward achieving accurate communication with my health care providers.

Wynne Whyman volunteers with the HLAA’s Get in the Hearing Loop national committee and chairs the Let’s Loop Colorado project. She holds two master’s degrees and is a learning architect - developing executive leadership and other courses that focus on the organizational and learner needs.