Caregiving for a Veteran with Hearing Loss

Today’s Agenda

– Welcome & Overview of Today’s Call:
  • Jed Johnson, Easter Seals Dixon Center
– Thank You to Partner Organizations
– Caregiver Welcome
  • Elizabeth Dole Foundation Fellow, Jennifer Mackinday
    (Indiana)
– Guest Speaker
  • Paula J. Myers, PhD CCC-A, Chief, Audiology Section,
    James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital Tampa, FL
– Online Q & A
  • VA Caregiver Support Program, Michelle Stefanelli,
    National Program Manager
– Thank You and Next Steps
Easter Seals...  
- Easter Seals provides exceptional services, education, outreach, and advocacy so that people living disabilities and their families can live, learn, work and play in our communities.  
- Established 1919. Seventy-four affiliates with 550 service sites across the U.S.

Easter Seals Caregiving Footprint...  
- [http://www.easterseals.com/caregiver](http://www.easterseals.com/caregiver)

Military/Veteran Caregivers...  
- Webinar series  
- Contract with VA to provide Caregiver training  
- Member of Elizabeth Dole Foundation Military Caregiver Coalition

Smoking Cessation & Caregivers Initiative...  
- Easter Seals and CVS Health are offering smoking cessation programs, which help veterans, caregivers and people with disabilities quit smoking and live healthier! [www.easterseals.com/stopsmoking](http://www.easterseals.com/stopsmoking)
Thank you to Our Partners!

- Atlas Research
- Caregiver Action Network
- Family Caregiver Alliance
- National Alliance for Caregiving
- Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving
- USO

Supported by Newman’s Own Foundation
Jennifer Mackinday (Indiana):

When Jennifer Mackinday's brother, Army Specialist James Smith, was wounded by an IED blast during combat operations in Mosul, Iraq, the list of impairments was long, and, to most military caregivers, all too familiar: TBI, PTSD, elbow replacement, hearing loss, migraines, and more. What James found in his sister was something special: a devoted caregiver, trained through the Easter Seals and Wounded Warrior Project caregiving classes and mentorship program. An Elizabeth Dole Fellow, award-winning author and recipient of the President’s Volunteer Service Award, Jennifer has become a passionate advocate for military caregivers. She is also the proud mother of a United States Marine.

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Caregiving for Veterans with Hearing Loss

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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government.

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Hearing Loss and Tinnitus in Veterans

Auditory system disabilities (including hearing loss and tinnitus) are among the most common service-related disabilities in every period of service since WWII.
Prevalence of Hearing Loss (HL)

• 34 - 36 million Americans have some degree of HL & this number is projected to rise to 52.9 million by 2050.

• Extrapolating from a number of population based studies, HL prevalence ranges from 30-47% among persons 65+ years.

Hearing Loss Occurs in Context of Other Age Related Co-Morbidities

- Cognitive decline
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Vestibular dysfunction
- Visual impairment
- Decline in ability to perform activities of daily living

http://www.betterhearing.org/news/keep-your-mind-sharp%E2%80%94address-hearing-loss
Implications of Hearing Loss

- Social isolation
- Depression
- Poor self reported health
- Increased odds of hospitalization and healthcare use
- Increased possibility of medical errors
- Poorer health related outcomes due to potential communication barriers with healthcare providers and caregivers

http://www.betterhearing.org/node/15861#sthash.amf5mPQ5.dpuf
Hearing loss is Under Reported and Under Treated

- Only 8% of individuals with HL age 70-79 report owning a hearing aid
- Only 14% of those individuals identified with hearing loss over the age of 80 report owning a hearing aid  (Chien and Lin, 2012)

Age-Related Hearing Loss
Why Untreated Hearing Loss Matters

Domains of Quality of Life and Quality of Care Affected by Untreated Hearing Loss

Successful Life Course Transitions  Psychological Well-Being

Independence

Self Reported Health  Social Well Being

Why Identify and Refer At Risk Adults?

Promote more effective transitions in care

Improve quality of health care delivery

Promote patient-centered care
Some Common Signs of Hearing Impairment

• Words are difficult to understand
• Another person’s speech sounds slurred or mumbled; worse in background noise
• Certain sounds are overly loud or annoying
• Turn up TV or radio louder
• TV shows, concerts, or social gatherings are less enjoyable because much goes on unheard

• If you have trouble hearing, see your doctor for referral to ENT or audiologist.
Referral to Audiologists

• Audiologists have a broad scope of practice, specializing in the long-term management of hearing loss, balance disorders & tinnitus. Although an essential component of their work revolves around the selection & fitting of hearing aids, they offer many other services beyond hearing aid fitting to maximize communication function.

• Most VA audiologists are trained with a doctoral degree (e.g., AuD, PhD). All VA audiologists are required to maintain a state license.
Facts about Audiology Services in VA

• The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers comprehensive audiology care services to Veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance problems.

• VA is the largest employer of audiologists in the United States, employing over 1100 audiologists.

• Consistent with the VA mission, Audiology is involved with training and research.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

VA audiologists provide a range of clinic services to Veterans and Service members. Services include:

- Hearing screenings
- Diagnostic hearing evaluations
- Hearing aid, hearing aid accessory, and other device fittings
- Aural Rehabilitation
- Vestibular Assessment
- Vestibular Rehabilitation
- Cochlear Implant Evaluation and mapping
- Tinnitus Assessment
- Tinnitus Management
- Ototoxic monitoring

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Referral to ENT

• ENT for sudden hearing loss or chronic ear related medical condition present or when symptoms (e.g. dizziness, tinnitus) suggest a possible medical etiology.
• Visible deformity of the outer ear
• Somatic or pulsatile tinnitus
• Any history of active drainage from the ear within the last 90 days
• Any history of sudden hearing loss within the last 90 days
• Any acute or chronic dizziness
• A sudden asymmetrical hearing loss
• A conductive hearing loss
• Ear pain/discomfort
VESTIBULAR DISORDERS AND REHABILITATION

• Problems with dizziness, balance and falls are also common among Veterans and are often symptoms of underlying medical conditions.
• Dizziness problems may be related to part of the inner ear known as the vestibular system. These problems typically cause difficulties with balance. Balance is complex and relies on input from the vestibular, visual, and somatosensory systems.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Vestibular System

- Dizziness and balance disorders account for 40% of falls
- Falls are the leading cause of injury and death for people over 55
- About 1 in 3 older adults sustain a fall each year resulting in physical injury or psychological distress

http://www.asha.org/aud/Articles/Fall-Prevention--Patient-Centered-Outcomes/?utm_source=asha&utm_medium=enewsletter&utm_campaign=accessaud091515
Symptoms that may warrant balance testing referral

Audiologists perform tests to assess balance function when the following symptoms are present:

• Rapid, involuntary eye movement (nystagmus)
• Room spinning sensation (vertigo)
• Complaints of dizziness
• Difficulty walking

Some Audiologists work with physical therapists to develop individualized treatment plans to minimize, recover balance, & improve daily functional activities.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
How We Hear

Two Common Types of Hearing Loss

Conductive HL

*Sound is blocked in the outer or middle ear.*

- **Causes:**
  - Excessive earwax
  - Damaged eardrum
  - Ear infection or fluid in the middle ear
  - Stiffness in the bones of the middle ear (otosclerosis)

- **Solution:**
  - Most often medically by ENT treated with high success
  - Hearing aids very successful if unable to treat medically
Two Types of Common Hearing Loss

**Sensorineural Hearing Loss**

*Inner ear hair cells or hearing nerve is damaged and cannot send complete signals to the brain.*

**Causes:**
- Aging
- Noise Exposure
- Hereditary factors

**Solutions:**
- Cannot be corrected with medicine or surgery
- Hearing aids can help but cannot make up for distortion / damaged sensory hair cells
Degrees of Hearing Loss

• **Mild**—will have trouble hearing soft or distant speech
• **Moderate**—will have trouble hearing speech at normal conversation level
• **Severe**—will have trouble hearing loud speech
• **Profound**—will have trouble hearing environmental sounds

• **Important:** Even mild hearing loss can impact speech and language skills
What Does the Word Below Say?

Loudness
What Does the Word Below Say?

Loudness
What Does the Word Below Say?

Cleanness
What Does the Word Below Say?

Clearness
I can HEAR you, but can’t UNDERSTAND You!

• Making the sounds louder does not always make things better. Our brain still must make sense out of the signal our ear is sending.

• Remember, a hearing impaired ear is sending a “damaged” signal to his/her brain to tell the Veteran that he/she heard something.
Management of Auditory Disorders
Treatment for Hearing Loss

• The most common treatment for hearing loss is hearing aids and/or cochlear implants.

• Audiologists work with Veterans and their families/caregivers to improve communication by using advanced technologies and extensive counseling.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Medical/Surgical

• A doctor can remove earwax in the outer ear.
• Antibiotics and decongestants are effective treatments for middle ear problems from ear infections or allergies.
• Ear surgery if there are abnormalities of the ear canal, eardrum, middle ear bones etc.
BEST TECHNOLOGY ANYWHERE

Through national contracting with the Denver Acquisition and Logistics Center (DALC), the VA is able to provide state of the art technology to Veterans with hearing loss. Devices include:

- Hearing Aids
- FM Systems
- Cochlear Implants
- Bone-anchored Hearing Aids
- Tinnitus Maskers/Sound Generators
- Assistive/Alerting Devices

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Hearing Aid Styles
Bone Anchored Hearing Aid (BAHA)

- BAHA is a type of hearing aid based on bone conduction for persons primarily with conductive HL or unilateral HL
- The placement involves invasive surgery which carries a risk of complications

Cochlear Implants

• Cochlear implants are special devices designed to restore hearing sensation & perception to a person with severe to profound sensorineural hearing loss in both ears who derive no benefit from hearing aids.
• Sound is detected by a head-worn microphone, encoded by a small digital signal processor, and presented directly to the person’s inner ear via an array of surgically implanted electrodes to enhance the ability to perceive speech.
Aural Rehabilitation
(Hearing Aids or Cochlear Implants are often not enough)

- Personal Amplifiers
- Bluetooth wireless audio streaming hearing aid/cochlear implant accessories
- Aural rehabilitation class (communication strategies)
- Auditory training or lip-reading training
- Tinnitus management
- Smartphone apps
Assistive Listening Devices

- These are special amplification systems used to improve communication over the telephone, in noisy places, or at great distances.
- A microphone is placed at an optimal location near the speaker's mouth, often connected to a small FM transmitter. The person with HL listens through a cochlear implant, hearing aids, or headphones.
- In most cases, the negative effects of background noise are reduced, and the received quality of speech is improved.
Frequency modulation (FM) systems

• The personal FM system consists of a transmitter microphone worn by the speaker (caregiver) and a receiver used by the Veteran with HL. The receiver transmits the sound to his/her ears or directly to some hearing aids.

• Personal FM systems are useful in a variety of situations, such as in a meeting, noisy restaurant, or in a nursing home or senior center.

• FM systems are also used in theaters, places of worship, museums, public meeting places, and other large areas for gathering.
Amplified Telephones or Captioned Telephones

• There are free amplified telephone and CaptionCall phones available for Veterans with hearing loss.

• See your VA audiologist for details.
TINNITUS MANAGEMENT

Tinnitus is the medical term for the perception of sound in the ears or head when no external noise is present. The sound can be intermittent or constant, range is severity from mild to severe, and is often described as a ringing, roaring or humming sound.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Although the cause of tinnitus is unknown, there are likely sources that trigger or worsen tinnitus:

- Hearing loss
- Noise exposure
- Injury to head or neck
- Stress
- Excessive ear wax
- Ototoxicity

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Currently there is no cure for tinnitus; however, there are management options. Tinnitus management includes education, sound therapy (including hearing aids/sound generators), counseling and/or Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) coping skill techniques.

PTM is a tiered strategy used within the VA that starts with education & then continues to use devices & CBT coping skill technique strategies based on the individual needs of the Veteran.
Lip-reading Training

- Most people with HL watch the speaker’s mouth & face for visible cues as they listen through their cochlear implants, hearing aids, or assistive devices.
- Lip-reading helps a person obtain speech information that is not heard clearly (e.g., high frequency consonants) to maximize communication function.
Communication Training

• Caregivers are a Veteran’s vital communication partner. You can speak more clearly by doing four things when communicating:

  • Slow down a bit;
  • Speak a tiny bit louder;
  • Say things as clearly as possible without exaggerating their mouth movements; and
  • Pause at meaningful places so that the Veteran’s ears can catch up with your mouth.

http://www.betterhearing.org/hearingpedia/counseling-articles-tips/clear-speech
Communication Tips for the Caregiver of a Veteran with Hearing Loss

- Face the Veteran and make sure you have his/her full attention
- Turn extraneous noise off (i.e. TV, radio)
- Ensure hearing aid or assistive device is turned on
- Position yourself at the same level as the patient
- Confirm his/her understanding of instructions by using the teach back method
- Use other modalities (i.e. visual) when possible to reinforce what is communicated. Ensure eyeglasses are on
- Rather than yes/no questions, use open ended questions
- Slow your speech rate down, speak clearly and increase your volume by about 10% but do not shout
In Summary

Why is Recognizing Hearing Loss Important?

• Untreated hearing loss can often hide behind the other difficulties it creates; you might notice a symptom but not understand that hearing loss is the cause.

• For example, while you may notice that the Veteran has become depressed or withdrawn, you might not think to connect these behaviors with the possibility that they can’t hear well or realize that they’re backing out of social situations for this reason.
Why is Recognizing Hearing Loss Important (con’t)?

• In fact, untreated hearing loss has been connected with many other health conditions such as depression, dementia and cognitive decline, hypertension and stress, and balance issues.

• If the Veteran is already dealing with these conditions, hearing loss could exacerbate them. What’s more, conditions like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease can also affect a person’s hearing ability.
Why is Recognizing Hearing Loss Important (con’t)?

• However, using hearing aids or other devices to address hearing loss can help to counteract these effects.

• Research has shown that those who use hearing aids to combat hearing loss have a better quality of life.

• And isn’t this the goal of every caregiver – to do everything possible to make Veterans’ with hearing loss lives better each day and ultimately yours?
What Can You Do as a Caregiver?

• Become knowledgeable about recognizing the signs of hearing loss & when to seek treatment
• Encourage the Veteran with hearing loss to seek treatment at the VA audiology clinic
• Use good communication strategies to maximize communication function
• Seek additional resources in the community
• Take care of yourself
SITES OF VA AUDIOLOGY CARE

Audiology Services are found in over 400 sites of care in the VA health care system including medical centers, hospitals, outpatient clinics and community based outpatient clinics.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR AUDIOLOGY CARE?

All Veterans enrolled in VA’s health care system are eligible for comprehensive audiology diagnostic evaluations. Specific eligibility rules apply to hearing aid services.

http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/factsheet/Audiology-FactSheet.pdf
Hearing Aids

• To receive hearing aids through VA, the Veteran must first register at the health Administration/enrollment section of the VA Medical Center of choice.

• The following documents are usually needed at the time of registration: a copy of the Veteran's DD214, driver's license and health insurance (if available).

  http://www.rehab.va.gov/PROSTHETICS/psas/Hearing_Aids.asp
Several Ways to Enroll:

- In person at any VA Medical Center or Clinic
- **Online by filling out the Form 10-10EZ.**
- By mailing completed Form 10-10EZ to the Medical Center of your choice (please be sure to sign your application or it cannot be processed for enrollment)
- Once registered (or if already registered), a referral to the Audiology Clinic may be requested through Veteran’s assigned VA Primary Care Provider. The audiologist will perform the evaluation and make a clinical determination on the need for hearing aids and/or other hearing assistive devices. If eligible, hearing aids, repairs, and future batteries will all be at no charge.
Protect Your Hearing

Block the noise (use earplugs)
Avoid the noise
Turn down the sound
Resources for Veterans with Hearing Loss and their Caregivers

This list includes both governmental and private organizations. Inclusion on this list shall not be seen as an endorsement by this presenter or the services they provide. It is intended only to provide information about additional resources which may be available. These were accessed 8/17/15:

http://www.publichealth.va.gov/vethealthinitiative/hearing_impairment.asp

http://militaryaudiology.org/site/

http://www.ncrar.research.va.gov/ForVets/Resources.asp

http://hearinghealthfoundation.org/veterans

http://www.betterhearing.org/hearingpedia/hearing-loss-resources

http://www.hearingloss.org/content/veterans http://www.asha.org/

http://www.audiology.org/
Military Caregivers Webinar Series

- Stay tuned – next webinar scheduled for October 22nd on the topic of “Caregiving While Raising Children.”
- Handouts, recording, & transcript to be posted to www.easterseals.com/carewebinar
- Contact: militarycaregiver@easterseals.com with any questions
- Will keep you apprised of future webinars and new partner resources