



CASE BY CASE

SUBMITTED BY PEG SASS-SIMON, M.A.
and TERRY SIMON

Patient History

His name is Tony. He grew up as the youngest of nine on a farm in the middle of Michigan and joined the Marines as a young man to serve his country in two wars. He believes in guardian angels because of the times he was left standing while those around him had fallen. His older brother taught him the construction trade and he spent his life as a contractor. In his middle years he was a giant of a man, but always impressed people with his gentle nature. He was devoted to his family, his work and his religion. His hard physical occupation took a toll on him in his later years. Today he is no longer able to move around easily and he has trouble understanding what is said in public places due to noise-induced hearing loss. That combined with 16% discrimination in his right ear leaves him isolated and out of touch with the activities he used to enjoy, especially participation in the church that sustained him for most of his 85 years of life. Like many men who have survived the

harshness of war, he has a hard time accepting his handicap and admitting his hearing loss. He doesn't want to be a bother and doesn't really trust or understand technology.

Keeping in the Loop

Hearing Wellness Center installed an induction loop system in his church. It is a great joy to hear him describe the experience of using his T-Coil equipped hearing instrument. He claims he can hear everything, even the minister whispering to others on the altar. He thinks it's funny he has to repeat some of the sermon to his wife who has normal hearing. His hearing aids help him in most situations, but they simply can't isolate what he wants to hear from other sounds when there's a normal level of background noise. The loop systems installed in his home, church and the theater he frequents complete his hearing aids and give him back that part of the life he dearly missed.

Expanding Services & Building a Business

Tony is fortunate to be one of the thousands of people “put in the loop” by audiologist Peg Sass-Simon from the Hearing Wellness Center in Spring Lake, MI. Peg has become known in the community for the impact she has made looping churches and other public places in West Michigan. Six years ago she took the plunge and opened Hearing Wellness Center. Peg had a fair number of contacts from her years as an audiologist in an ENT practice, but that wasn’t enough to keep her busy in a private practice. The first year and a half were successful, but less than she needed to maintain the level of service she wanted to offer. The center was established on the foundation of excellence in patient care, and Peg didn’t want the public perception of a high pressure hearing center. Growth was flat without advertising low prices and specials. Word of mouth referrals were all that sustained the business. It didn’t help that the area was depressed financially and held the distinction of having the highest unemployment rate in the country for a period of time.

Terry Simon, Peg’s husband, ran an inspection software company from the same building, and played the role of accountant and office manager for the Hearing Wellness Center. They both had knowledge of induction loops, but Terry’s background in business and product development made him pay attention when he heard about the success of a California audiologist that had introduced loops as an integral part of the rehabilitation process for his patients. The results had been extraordinary for the patients and the practice. By including a home loop with each T-Coil equipped hearing aid, the patient’s satisfaction level soared. The average rating of their television experience increased two full points on a scale of one to five. An unexpected and even larger improvement was the same increase in overall satisfaction of the patient’s hearing aid. The audiologist also claimed that he had never had a return on a hearing aid that included a home loop. Peg took the idea and tried it with her patients, with the same success that was experienced in California.

What’s the Buzz?

Word-of-mouth referrals increased dramatically and the happiness of the patients was visible and well known. They had always complimented Peg on the quality of the hearing instrument selection and fit, but that wasn’t something they talked about in the community. The loops were another story. People talked about this great little device that let them hear TV

clearly for the first time in ages. They started asking about their churches and other public facilities. Terry and Peg found a great synergy between public facility loops and the smaller home devices. They also identified a need to insure the hearing aids were properly programmed to use the loop. Designing and installing the loop properly is critical to effective hearing assistance, but the perception of the quality of the loop was determined by the quality of the user’s hearing aid and programming. Peg found she had to attend each installation, meet the users and adjust their hearing aids to insure the success of the installation. An unexpected bonus of this final step was the number of new patients Peg found at each looped facility.

It’s a WIN WIN

It’s an “everybody wins” situation. Peg’s business grew 250% in 4 1/2 years without any other promotion. At the end of last year they looped their local airport. It was only the second airport looped in the US. That installation won a front page article in the business section of their local Sunday newspaper. The patient gets a free home loop with their new hearing aid and the community gets affordable access.

Peg and Terry install the public loop at cost and get visibility with that group of people, which brings more patients to the Hearing Wellness Center. They tell people, churches and other public venues about the loop technology and sell the idea to the house of worship, theater, store or auditorium. In six short years Peg is known throughout the community as the hearing professional that really cares about her patients and is there to help them hear everywhere! For her there’s no down side to being known as the “loop lady.” ■

Margaret (Peg) Sass-Simon, received her Master’s degree in Audiology from Central Michigan University in 1985. She spent the first part of her career working with a group of Ear, Nose and Throat physicians. In 2004 she entered into private practice and established the Hearing Wellness Center. This year she also established the non-profit Hearing Wellness Organization.

Terry Simon received his Industrial Engineering Degree from Michigan State University. He worked his way through the engineering discipline into product and business development. He holds nine patents and one software copyright. Terry is the owner of Wireless Hearing Solutions and the creator of the induction loop systems manufactured by inLOOP. For more information contact simon@inloop.tv.

IN MY OPINION

We want to know what you think. If you have a suggestion for an “In My Opinion” topic idea or an opinion to share, please contact Nancy Gilliom, Ph.D. at gilliomaudiology@comcast.net.

Telecoil Connectivity and Hearing Loop “Hot Spots”

BY BRENDA BATTAT, M.A.

The patient has just left your office with new hearing aids. Unfortunately once the honeymoon period is over they may soon discover that they are not able to hear as well as they would like to in all situations. As long as hearing aids do not “correct” hearing your patients may need additional help to hear in noisy restaurants, on the phone, listening to a speaker in an auditorium, at a service in a house of worship - possibly the very reasons they sought a hearing aid in the first place. Remember when President Clinton said now that he had hearing aids he would be able to take questions from the very back of the room? Doesn't sound as if anyone prepared him for what he would and would not be able to do!

But there is a way around this through the inclusion of a simple option, the telecoil, that connects seamlessly to hearing loop “hot spots” that are cropping up in communities throughout the country. Popular and prevalent in Europe hearing loops are seeing a revival in the US largely due to the passionate ground-breaking work carried on by HLAA member, David Myers, Ph.D. in his “Let's Loop America” advocacy endeavor. Once people have experienced sound through their

telecoil connecting to a hearing loop they become evangelists for looping and telecoils.

Telecoils are old technology, you may say. Yes - but they are inexpensive, unobtrusive and most importantly, effective in providing seamless connectivity to hearing loops, neck loop attachments to FM and Infrared receivers and hearing aid compatible phones. More importantly they can increase satisfaction with hearing aid performance.

Telecoil connectivity can overcome the very situations that frustrate hearing aid users and too often results in their putting the hearing aid aside or returning it for a refund. This is a waste of everyone's time not to mention the dissatisfaction factor that influences other people in their decision whether or not to get a hearing aid. Teaching patients early on how to stretch the functioning of their hearing aid will pay off in the long run as they will be happier with their hearing aids.

No time to get into things beyond the hearing aid with your patients? Demonstrate! Set up a loop system in your office for them to experience listening to the TV without the need for cumbersome headsets or receivers. They could replicate this at home and stop driving everyone crazy from having the TV volume too loud. Have them make a live telephone call right in your office to practice positioning the phone to find the “sweet spot” that brings in the telecoil function at its best. Have them balance the telecoil and volume controls on their hearing aid and the phone together for maximum effect. It takes practice to get it right but what better place for patients to

learn all this than from their hearing professional and the earlier the better before disillusionment in the real world sets in.

All landline phones by law are hearing aid compatible and have volume control. A percentage of cell phones also must be hearing aid compatible. Cell phones are rated according to the C63.19 standard that measures the likelihood of interference when used with a hearing aid or cochlear implant. Look for the ratings M (microphone setting) 3 or 4 and T (telecoil setting) 3 or 4 as required by FCC regulations. The higher the number the better for hearing aid use. Be sure to check out the immunity of the hearing aids you dispense. The higher the hearing aid immunity the more likely the patient will experience a good reception with many cell phones.

Hearing loops are one type of hearing assistive technology covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This law requires installation of listening systems to ensure that programs and services in public places such as theaters and hotels, and state and local governments, are accessible to people with hearing loss. Knowing the laws governing accessibility of relevance to people with hearing loss enables you to teach your patients where they can connect through their telecoils to the

hearing loop “hot spots” in their communities. If there aren’t any where they live you can be sure they will start advocating for them. ■

Brenda Battat is the executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America. She uses a hearing aid and a cochlear implant with telecoils for phone use, to connect with hearing loop “hot spots” and neck loop attachments when FM or Infra-red receivers are provided.

► **If you are interested in sharing your thoughts and ideas on this topic, please sign up for ADACONnect, ADA’s interactive Listserve, which facilitates an open dialogue among members and meaningful peer-to-peer knowledge transfer. Visit www.audiologist.org to join ADACONnect today!**

20 times as many patients rate their hearing aids at the top of the scale if they have T-coils & a home loop system.

We have home loops that don’t need installation
Complete design and installation support
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Wireless Hearing Solutions by inLOOP is a full service loop manufacturer. We distribute the best loop equipment available in the US. Our installers can loop your community, or we’ll train you and your staff! Our industry leading training and technical support are no charge to our customers. Guaranteed - No risk

I’ve never had a hearing aid returned when I’ve supplied the patient with a home loop system!

Margaret (Peg) Sass-Simon M.A. CCC-A

Wireless Hearing Solutions by inLOOP was started to support Peg’s hearing center by looping her community. With over 600 hearing centers as customers we are uniquely qualified to bring you “INTO THE LOOP!”



GET IN THE LOOP! COMPLETE THE HEARING AID!

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