Too Many People with Hearing Loss Miss Out

Did you know your patients must have telecoils in their hearing devices to effectively use ADA-mandated assistive listening technology?

Telecoils are the best thing since sliced bread.

Hearing aids, cochlear implants, and bone conductive devices work remarkably well for one-to-one conversations. However, many people continue to struggle to hear and understand in public places: city council meetings, parks and recreation activities, workshops, classes, work meetings, museums, theaters, places of worship, and health care settings. Missing a boarding announcement or getting off at the wrong station may quickly turn travel into a stressful and frustrating experience.

To hear and understand in situations like these, assistive listening systems and devices are necessary. Many people with hearing loss who rely on hearing instruments experience difficulties in loud, crowded, or noisy situations. But many people have never heard about or don’t understand assistive listening systems or devices, or how they could benefit from such hearing assistive technology (HAT). Perhaps they see someone with an assistive listening device at the theater but don’t know where to find one, or they don’t realize it could help them.

Hearing loop and telecoil technology can make a world of difference in meeting rooms, places of worship, and in many other venues.

Because hearing loss seems so common, many individuals who have hearing loss may not consider themselves to have a disability. They are unaware that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides protections for people with hearing loss, including the right to effective communication. Currently, hearing aid compatibility can be accomplished via an activated telecoil in a hearing instrument.
Bluetooth Technology

Although it is well established that Bluetooth is beneficial for watching TV and using a mobile phone, this newer technology is currently not capable of connecting multiple users to a large public assistive listening system. It is generally recognized that many consumers need access to both Bluetooth and telecoils.

Telecoil Technology

Many people miss out because their audiologists or hearing health care providers didn’t counsel them about the advantages of using telecoils in public places.

While experienced hearing aid users praise telecoils, surveys have shown that fewer than half of all providers counsel clients on the use of telecoils in hearing devices, and less than a third of providers discuss the availability and use of hearing assistive technologies, specifically assistive listening systems in public venues that can supplement hearing instruments.

To help all parties, the American Academy of Audiology in cooperation with the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) launched the Get in the Hearing Loop in 2010, a national campaign to raise the awareness of hearing care professionals and people with hearing loss of the benefits of telecoils, hearing loops, and assistive technology in general.

The original campaign has been expanded by HLAA into a formalized Get in the Hearing Loop program. Other organizations like Sertoma have joined our awareness raising efforts, and some states have enacted legislation to ensure patients are counseled on telecoils and assistive listening systems prior to purchase and demonstrated their proper use at the time of fitting.

Help your clients hear everywhere: Educate them about the benefits of telecoils and how to use them with public assistive listening systems.

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GITHL Advocacy Toolkit
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1 Greer Clark, J & Glib, B, (Audiology Today, 2019, March/April)
www.audiology.org/audiology-today-marchapril-2019/hat-awareness-efficiency-may-be-key-increased-use


Stop Trash Talking Telecoils!  Please.

By Gael Hannan, reprinted with permission.

I don’t know how to say this more clearly: Telecoils in my hearing aids have made my life better.

Better, happier, easier, and more connected. And I’m not the only one—there are gazillions of us. Because of this positive experience, it’s frustrating for us, the hearing loss advocates and international organizations—to hear that audiologists are advising against telecoils, saying, “they’re ‘old technology’,” and, “Here, try this newest, greatest thing!”

Without telecoils, I wouldn’t have been able to use the phone as well as I have for the past 20 years. I still use mine to talk on my cell and landline, daily.

Without telecoils, I would continue jostling for space at the front of a group or crowd, needing to sit in the front row so that I could better see and lipread the speaker. Now I can stand at the back of a crowded hall like I recently did at the national conventions of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association/CHHA and the Hearing Loss Association of America/HLAA. In plenary sessions and smaller workshops, the speakers’ voices flowed beautifully into my devices. (Bluetooth can’t do that—the poor presenters would have 100 transmitters hanging around their necks or pinned to their clothes.)

Without telecoils, I wouldn’t have been able to use audio guides in museums, art galleries, boat tours and other facilities around the world that care about inclusion for people with hearing loss. I would have needed to rely on imperfect relay by my Hearing Husband or I would have had to get by with only the visual information.

I’ve used telecoils in other looped environments such as at church, at the bank, and watching TV at home. When I’m presenting or performing, in addition to the audience area being looped, I ask for the stage area to be looped as well because it lets me hear myself better (always a good thing for the presenter).

Still, many audiologists say that telecoils are ‘old technology’ as if discoveries come with a “Use By” date when they are suddenly no longer useful. I mean, hey! What about the wheel? It’s a very old invention—and to this day, wheels still make our world go ’round. Penicillin and insulin were invented in the 1920’s and they are still saving lives. So, while telecoils are decades old, they still provide crucial and exquisite access to communication.

Hearing care professionals need to stop trash-talking telecoils, because people with hearing loss around the world love them! We love how switching our devices to the telecoil mode connects us to other people. And it’s not an either-or situation. We also love what Bluetooth does for us when we can use it. We adore the great improvements in speech-to-text technology. We are passionate about captioning.

We want it all, and today we can have it all, but only if hearing care professionals put client needs first and consider our overall, everyday hearing requirements. Professionals, if you are still not convinced simply because we say so, we strongly recommend that you attend a consumer hearing loss event. There, you can see for yourselves the look on the face of a person with hearing loss when he or she experiences telecoils for the first time in a workshop or when someone sings the national anthem and every word is crisp and clear. That look of wonder is worth more than a CEU or two.

And if you are a patient whose hearing care professional tries to talk you out of a telecoil, be polite but firm:

Give. Me. A. Telecoil!

Gael Hannan is a writer, speaker and advocate on hearing loss issues. In addition to her weekly blog at the Better Hearing Consumer, which has an international following, Gael wrote the acclaimed book The Way I Hear It: A Life with Hearing Loss. This article originally appeared on the Hearing Health & Technology Matters website.

Follow Gael on her blog at https://hearinghealthmatters.org/betterhearingconsumer/
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Let Your Patients Know You Care

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1. Help your patients learn how to live well with hearing loss

2. Get listed in HLAA Searchable Hearing Health Care Directory and a premium listing in Hearing Tracker, a $500 value

3. Learn about the latest hearing loss news from the patient’s perspective

4. Be a featured guest presenter for an HLAA webinar

5. Educate your patients about telecoils so they can easily attend theater and other events using ADA mandated assistive listening systems

6. Become informed about local and national issues that affect your patients

7. Help your patients learn how to advocate for themselves

8. Become part of the grassroots Get in the Hearing Loop Program

9. Receive Hearing Life Magazine

10. Be part of a national organization advocating for people with hearing loss

Help your patients find a local HLAA Chapter:
www.hearingloss-wa.org/chapters

HLAA Hearing Loss Association of America

hearingloss.org
inquiry@hearingloss.org

Get in the Hearing Loop Program
GITHL Advocacy Toolkit
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