

ADULT AURAL REHABILITATION

A critical component in modern clinical practice.



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5 Keys Communication

In today's technology-driven world, the words "aural rehabilitation" could almost be used synonymously with "hearing aids" as most providers spend the majority of their treatment time discussing, programming, fitting, verifying, troubleshooting and pairing hearing aids. Yes, wireless connectivity and smartphone hearing aid apps are wonderful. But as with most innovations, there are some downsides. They've added a layer of complexity to our fitting process that requires much more instructional time - time that could be spent on the other areas of aural rehabilitation. Education, counseling, and auditory training had already taken the backseat to hearing aids, even before we started spending 30 minutes of our precious clinic time teaching our clients how to download apps and pair devices.

Another downside of this fabulous new technology is an unrealistic expectation. Without proper education and counseling, our clients may believe that their amazing new hearing aids can do it all! They don't understand that they (and their communication partners) play a critical role in the success of their hearing loss treatment.

The final downside to this techno-centric treatment model is a disturbing lack of differentiation. Consumers will continue to have more and more options when it comes to purchasing hearing aids. And many of those options will be more convenient and less expensive than what hearing care providers are able to offer.

For this reason, it is critical that we shift some of our focus away from the widget and onto the other aspects of aural rehabilitation that only we, trained hearing care professionals, are equipped to provide.

There are several definitions of aural rehabilitation floating around in the literature, but rather than bore you with formal definitions, we'll break it down with two questions.

**Why provide aural rehabilitation?
To help our clients live well with hearing loss.**

WHAT IS AURAL REHABILITATION?

Everything we do, say and give our clients to help them live well with hearing loss. (So the trick here is to make sure we are doing, saying and giving beyond the hearing aids.)

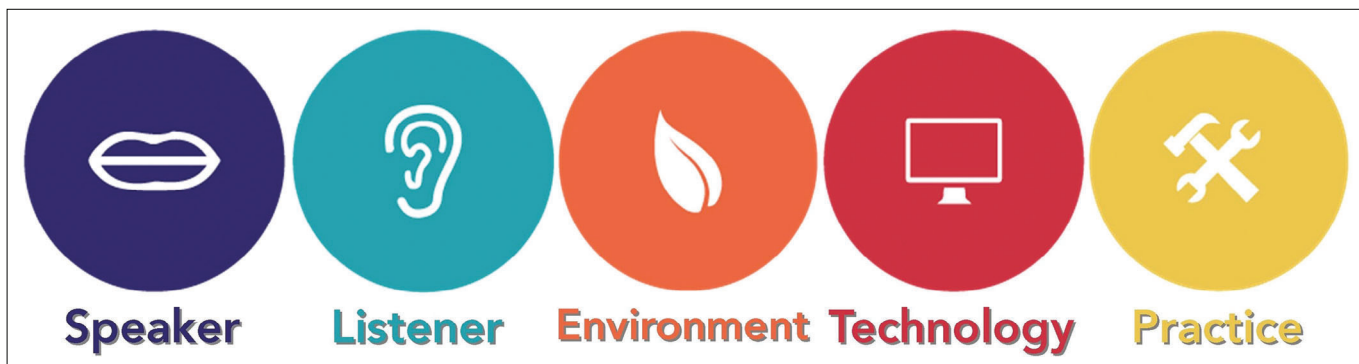
I like to break aural rehabilitation into 5 parts:

1. Amplification & Instruction (the widget and how to use it)
2. Education (communication strategies, environmental modifications)
3. Counselling (realistic expectations, emotional reactions to hearing loss)
4. Community (groups, organizations, blogs, resources)
5. Auditory Perceptual Training (computerised or in-person)

AMPLIFICATION

Our profession has mastered the amplification and instruction components of aural rehab. I attribute this to the fact that it is in the hearing aid manufacturer's best interest to do a really good job of educating and training us about their products. They make it fun and they make it simple, because they know we've got a lot on our plates and they want us to remember it. But when was the last time you had an aural rehab rep pop into your office with coffee and a simple yet effective presentation about client education, counselling, community or auditory training?

So, grab a coffee and allow me to attempt to give you some tips and tools that will help you provide a more comprehensive aural rehabilitation program that sets you apart from the commodities but doesn't take a lot of time. Let's start with client education.



CLIENT EDUCATION

It is our professional duty to provide education and resources to every client who seeks our professional help. Some of this education may need to be directed toward the family members who are often more bothered by the consequences of hearing loss than the client. It is important for this education to be delivered in a written format because our clients often won't remember what is said verbally during their visits. Education about assistive listening devices, communication strategies, and environmental modifications is readily available online. Australian consumer organisations like Deafness Forum, Better Hearing, Hearing Matters and Soundfair have wonderful websites filled with information that can be shared electronically with our clients or printed for in-person distribution. The major hearing aid manufacturers also offer excellent consumer education resources. Finally, the Ida Institute has excellent educational tools for both providers and consumers. The point here is that the resources are available. It is our job to make sure these resources make it into the hands/phones/computers of our clients.

COUNSELLING

Counselling our clients through the emotional effects of hearing loss starts with our very first encounter. It is imperative that we ask good, open-ended questions, that we intently listen to the answers, and then encourage our clients to tell us even more. This is what truly sets us apart from the commodities and it is worth the extra appointment time to make our clients feel heard and valued. Helping our clients to identify and focus on two or three hearing and communication goals will promote more efficient visits. In addition, it is important to set realistic expectations in the very beginning. Clients need to know that hearing aids are a tool to help their hearing, but improving communication also requires effort on the part of the client and his or her communication partners. Finally, there are going to be clients who require more counselling time or expertise than we are able to provide. It is important that we have one or two trusted counsellors or therapists to refer our clients to.

COMMUNITY

In an ideal world, every client would go through a group aural rehabilitation class when they get new hearing

aids. They would learn and practice communication strategies, share challenges and triumphs with their fellow classmates, and generally feel a sense of community with others who have hearing loss. Unfortunately, this scenario is incredibly rare in the real world, especially the world of private practice. So how do we give our clients this sense of community? Luckily, there are many wonderful options and our simple job is to point clients in the right direction.

One fantastic way to facilitate a sense of community for our clients is to encourage them to join one of the consumer organisations. We could even take it one step further and pay for their first year of membership as part of their aural rehabilitation program. These memberships provide our clients with education, advocacy, resources, and opportunities to connect with others who face similar challenges. Not all of our clients will want to join, but it is our job to make sure all of our clients know that they exist.

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION PLAN

Challenging Situation:
Going out to eat

Communication Partners Involved:
*usually just my wife
Sometimes daughter*

ENVIRONMENT Choose quieter restaurant, go at off-peak hours, request booth.

SPEAKER Get his attention before talking, don't talk with napkin near mouth.

LISTENER Watch my wife's face, listen to entire sentence, ask her to rephrase.

TECHNOLOGY Put hearing aids in "restaurant" program, adjust volume to wife's voice.

PRACTICE Try different restaurants, times, and tables. Wear hearing aids every day! 😊

Another great way to make our clients feel connected and supported outside of our clinic is to plug them into a blog or online community. These are continuously updated with new posts, videos, and other resources that we cannot possibly hope to provide during our short clinical encounters. They not only provide our clients with a sense of community but also a sense of empowerment that encourages them to play a more active role in their hearing loss

journey. Some examples of these online resources are HearingLikeMe.com, LivingWithHearingLoss.com with Shari Eberts, and Smart Hearing with Katherine Bouton.

AUDITORY TRAINING

Many people use the terms "Aural Rehabilitation" and "Auditory Training" interchangeably, but it is important to note that they are two different things. As previously discussed, aural rehabilitation (AR) includes everything we do to help our clients live well with hearing loss. It is the umbrella that covers all of our approaches to hearing loss treatment, while auditory training is just one of those approaches.

Auditory training has been defined as a purposeful and systematic presentation of sounds such that listeners are taught to make perceptual distinctions about those sounds¹.

In that ideal world where group AR classes occur regularly, clients would also receive multiple sessions of face-to-face auditory training as part of their post-fit treatment program. The reality is that most hearing care providers do not work in a setting that supports this kind of clinical time commitment. Thankfully, there are several computer-based and app-based auditory training programs that allow adult clients to train their auditory systems from the comfort of their own homes. An excellent 2015 review of these programs can be found in Seminars in Hearing². Two of the more well-known programs, Amptify (formerly CLEAR) and LACE are reviewed in this issue.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER WITH 5 KEYS

As a clinical audiologist, I have first-hand experience with the challenges that we face when trying to provide the comprehensive aural rehabilitation described thus far. For this reason, I've made it my professional mission to create effective and affordable resources for hearing care professionals that make it possible to offer these critical services to each and every client. 5 Keys started as a client handbook in 2013 and thanks to the excellent input from audiologists, researchers, and people living with hearing loss, it has evolved into a comprehensive program. One of the most exciting aspects of the 5 Keys Communication program is that every piece of it can be branded to your

practice, making it a unique marketing tool as well.

There are essentially three parts to the program and each part can be used alone or in combination with the others. The client handbook, *5 Keys to Communication Success*, is still a staple of the program. With bright colors and fun pictures of the program's canine mascot, the book clearly and succinctly lays out realistic hearing aid expectations and the importance of family member involvement. It proceeds to teach the reader the 5 Keys to Communication Success: speaker, listener, environment, technology and practice. It then systematically applies these keys to the most common difficult listening situations. As a supplement to the book, or for clients who aren't likely to read a short handbook, we've created Speaker and Listener Tip handouts.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION TRAINING

The third part of the 5 Keys program is the new Online Communication Training Program. This is the culmination of years of aural rehab conferences, personal clinical trials, and repeated requests to have the 5 Keys delivered in an electronic format. The Online Program is comprised of 53 short lessons delivered to enrolled clients weekly via email over the course of a year. Research shows that the vast majority of people, including older adults, regularly use email which makes it an effective delivery tool for this critical education. The lessons cover everything in the book and so much more. Every client needs to learn the basics in order to take personal responsibility for their treatment. From hearing aid care and use to communication strategies, the lessons have been designed to provide short snippets of education with the same bright colors and fun dog pictures found in the book. They include short "homework" assignments to help clients practice what they've learned. While the majority of clients want their education to be simple and efficient, there are going to be clients who want more. Each lesson includes a button that takes our more motivated clients deeper into the program. The buttons vary each week and lead to pages with everything we ever wanted to share with our clients, but simply didn't have the time. These pages include interactive lessons and quizzes about hearing aids, assistive



devices, communication strategies and environmental modifications. They also include information and links to consumer organisations, online communities and computerised auditory training programs. And of course, the 5 Keys Online Program is fully branded to your practice, including links to your social media sites and if desired, to your online review builders (Facebook, Google, etc.).

My excitement about the comprehensive nature of the 5 Keys Online Program is multiplied by the fact that clients are actually using it! The email delivery format of the program allows us to measure open rates, click rates and unsubscribe rates. These are reported to the participating clinics on a monthly basis so that they can monitor the effectiveness of the program for their clients. Of particular interest to us are the open rates, as they correlate with client compliance. The typically reported global email open rate is roughly 17%, which improves to around 21% for healthcare. The only study looking at compliance with a computerised aural rehabilitation program reported rates of less than 30%³.

We are thrilled the open rate for the 5 Keys Online Program averages between 50% - 60%.

We are constantly striving to improve compliance in order to make it the most valuable part of the participating clinic's comprehensive aural rehabilitation program. We are also proud to offer this new resource

at a low price that any practice can afford. The enrollment process is incredibly simple and there are no usernames or passwords to remember which drastically improves clinician compliance as well. For all the details, visit www.5keys.org.

I'm happy to offer two free tools that will help you with counselling and education. Our 5 Keys Digital Sample Pack includes free downloads of the 5 Keys Needs Assessment Form and the Successful Communication Plan that can be used alone or in conjunction with the other 5 Keys products. Access these free tools at www.5keys.org.

As you can see, there are many fantastic aural rehabilitation resources available, our only task is to use them! Clients can get their hearing aids from an ever-growing number of sources, but they can only get professional education, counselling and resources from us, their trusted providers. This is our superpower, it is what sets our hearing loss treatment apart from all others, and it is more attainable than you think. So finish that coffee and lets get to work! ●

REFERENCES

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