

## The Official Newsletter of HLAA-PA

*Support and Advocacy since 2001 for Pennsylvanians with Hearing Loss*

### In This Issue:

**Nancy's Message**  
**State Happenings**  
**Hospital Advocacy**  
**Max Your Mikes**  
**Donors**  
**About HLAA**

### HearSay Articles

HLAA-PA welcomes articles of interest to the hearing loss community for publication in HearSay, as well as suggestions for topics. Send e-mail to [editor@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:editor@hlaa-pa.org)

### DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in HearSay are those of the authors. Mention of goods and services in articles and advertisements does not mean HLAA-PA endorsement, nor does absence suggest disapproval.

To reach readers of HearSay, contact Lee Williams  
**Director of Marketing**  
([leewilliams@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:leewilliams@hlaa-pa.org))  
for information

**Link to online version:**  
**[tiny.cc/HearSay20211](http://tiny.cc/HearSay20211)**

### Nancy's Message

**by Nancy Kingsley, State Director**

Hearing loss related research has produced some recent developments of interest. At the University of Texas at Dallas, researchers created apps that work on both Android and iOS-based smartphones to filter out background noise and enhance speech, using only the phone's built-in microphone. The apps also indicate where the noise is coming from, enabling users to reorient their phone in order to improve sound quality. One such app, which was discussed in The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, uses artificial intelligence to remove unwanted sounds. These apps operate in real time, so the signal matches the speaker's lip movements. Benefits of the apps were demonstrated in testing at the University of Texas Dallas Callier Center for Communication Disorders. The research was funded by a five-year \$1.86 million grant from the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. For more information, go to [utdallas.edu/news/science-technology/apps-hearing-2020/](http://utdallas.edu/news/science-technology/apps-hearing-2020/)

In another study, the Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska found that dabrafenib (brand name Tafinlar), which is used to treat cancers with a BRAF gene mutation, has the potential to protect against hearing loss caused by noise exposure and cisplatin (another chemotherapy drug). Currently, 40 to 60% of patients treated with cisplatin develop a hearing loss. The study was conducted on mice and the findings were published in Science Advances, but if the results hold up, the treatment will become available to the general population. A particularly promising finding is that dabrafenib was able to prevent noise-induced hearing loss when given 24 hours after noise exposure. Additional information is at [news-medical.net/news/20210107/Repurposed-drug-can-treat-hearing-loss-in-humans.aspx](http://news-medical.net/news/20210107/Repurposed-drug-can-treat-hearing-loss-in-humans.aspx)

# **State Happenings** **by Carolyn Meyer, Outreach Coordinator**

While in-person meetings have been postponed, our joint captioned virtual meetings on Zoom continue to be successful. The next joint meeting will be in March , with no date set as we send this newsletter out to our readers. It will be posted on our state website [hlaa-pa.org](http://hlaa-pa.org) . Anyone can log on with no chapter membership required. Just follow the link on Zoom and register when requested. Chapter leaders will send a newsletter to members with further information on the presenter and topic of the meeting. On February 20, 2021 the All Generations (All Gen) chapter created once again a party event on Zoom, so there are many possibilities. Until now participants from MontCo, ChesCo, All Gen, and Philadelphia (Suburban-Northeast) have been participating in the planning, but all areas of the state are welcome to join. The possibilities are endless since we are not confined to physical space and limited by the weather. Please contact Mike Miles at [miles@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:miles@hlaa-pa.org) for further details

## **.NEWS FROM NATIONAL: THE HEAR ACT OF 2021**

Representative Matt Cartwright (D-PA) has introduced the Help Extend Auditory Relief Act of 2021. The Act would help America's seniors by amending the Social Security Act to include Medicare coverage for hearing rehabilitation, including hearing tests and hearing aids. HLAA has sent a letter of support for this legislation. Representative Cartwright would be happy to hear from his constituents as well as others regarding this bill and to know of their support. If you want to write a letter thanking him, you can use this letter as a model from HLAA. You can download a copy from [hlaa-pa.org](http://hlaa-pa.org) by clicking [HERE](#)

## **HEARING AID DONATIONS**

As Outreach Coordinator for our state organization, I get many calls from people who want to donate used hearing aids that they can no longer use but are in working order. In the past I have referred them to the Starkey Foundation but with strict Covid guidelines for personal hygiene, the Foundation no longer accepts these hearing aids. I am sorry to inform you about this. If you can wait a while longer and save them, I am sure in the future this service will once again become available. The used equipment was well appreciated in the past.

## **REMINDER: AWARD**

The Joe Meyer Memorial Grant for 2021 is presented to any applicant who is a resident of Pennsylvania who has hearing loss. The award is \$500.00 and can be used for many purposes to improve communication with hearing loss. This year it includes the purchase of hearing aids. Since the award was not presented in 2020, two applicants may be chosen this year. The application is on the state website [hlaa-pa.org](http://hlaa-pa.org) - click [HERE](#) or contact Carolyn Meyer [Meyer@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:Meyer@hlaa-pa.org)

The Marcia Finisdore Award for Advocacy: Please check the website as well for information. Marcia was a tireless advocate for those with hearing loss and we remember her with this award. It is a great honor in her memory.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Self-Advocacy for Hospital Safety**

**by Mike Miles**

During the pandemic, there have been numerous articles and webinar discussions concerning the communication difficulties experienced by people with hearing loss. The most obvious difficulty is due to most people wearing masks. Not only does a mask muffle the voice, but it also takes away the ability to lip read. On top of that, it is recommended that we stay at least six feet away from others.

What I've described contributes to the daily stress we've all experienced this past year (yes, it has already been a year!). But now let's put ourselves in a doctor's office or in a hospital for a procedure. I went to my audiologist for new hearing aids in August. At the check-in desk, not only was the employee wearing a mask, but she also talked to me while sitting behind thick plexiglass and looking sideways at her computer. And she had an accent. Does any of this sound familiar?

The good news for me was that I wasn't addressing a serious medical condition. What if the setting was the emergency room and I was in significant pain? Or I was about to be put under anesthesia, but the surgeon had a few questions for clarification? Understanding what is said behind masks can be important.

Medical situations can be stressful in a normal world for people with hearing loss, but COVID-19 has increased the number of roadblocks we have to overcome in order to guarantee our safety. The good news is that living with hearing loss has hopefully taught us to advocate for ourselves in order to function in a hearing world.

Several HLAA chapter members and the national HLAA office recognized the importance of communicating in medical settings for people with hearing loss, and in 2018, they prepared a Guide for Effective Communication in Health Care. It is broken down into two sections, one for the patient and one for the medical provider, and is available on the HLAA website at the link below. Fill out the two-page form titled "Communications Access Plan (CAP)" prior to your appointment or procedure and ask for the CAP information to be included in your medical chart.

[hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/HLAA\\_HC\\_Full\\_Guide.pdf](https://hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/HLAA_HC_Full_Guide.pdf)

HLAA also offers a detailed guide on "How Do I Communicate with Doctors, Nurses, and Staff at the Hospital During COVID-19?" at this link:

[hearingloss.org/communication-access-recommendations-hospitals-covid-19/](https://hearingloss.org/communication-access-recommendations-hospitals-covid-19/)

In January, the Southeast PA chapters held a combined Zoom meeting entitled "How to Self-Advocate in a Healthcare Setting." The speaker was Elaine McCaffrey, the President of the HLAA-Chicago North Shore Chapter and an HLAA Board of Directors member. Several years ago, Elaine's chapter made communication in healthcare settings a high-priority topic. They invited representatives from all of the Chicago area hospitals to a panel discussion with chapter members about what the hospitals were doing to provide accommodations for deaf and hard of hearing people.

When the first panel was held in 2015, it was interesting to note that the only accommodation offered by the four attending hospitals was ASL interpreting. Elaine commented that the hospitals were embarrassed to find out how little they knew about the needs of hard of hearing people, but all were committed to return in 2016 to talk about what they were able to implement at their respective hospitals based on what they learned from the audience. Here is a link to an article about this chapter's advocacy concerning hospital settings: [hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com/advocacy-1](https://hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com/advocacy-1)

The chapter's self-advocacy recommendations for hospital communication are at the following link:

[hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com/hospital-safety-1](http://hearinglosschicagonorthshore.com/hospital-safety-1)

To summarize, only you can communicate your individual needs to medical professionals, which is why the CAP form mentioned above is so important. Bring it with you to every medical appointment and add to it if you feel there is something that is not covered. A final recommendation is to prepare a placard like the one at the link below, which gives communication options for a masked speaker, and print it in a bright color to hang on your bed or medical chart. We can't assume that medical professionals know everything about the needs of hard of hearing people. Self-advocacy will make sure they are informed. [hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/Deaf-Hard-of-Hearing-Medical-Placard.pdf](http://hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/Deaf-Hard-of-Hearing-Medical-Placard.pdf).

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Max Your Mics**

**by Chris Doig**

Getting the most from our hearing equipment is something that we all strive for! Understanding how to maximize microphone directionality can provide essential knowledge for dealing with difficult listening situations and allow us to get the most from our hearing devices.

All hearing devices utilize microphones (mics) to pick up sounds. These mics are designed to pick up sounds directionally in one of three ways. They can focus in one direction (a directional mic), they can focus in all directions (an omnidirectional mic), or, when more than one mic is in use, they can focus their pickup area toward a given sound source (beamforming or array type mics).

In addition to mic directionality, mics can pick up sounds either at a fixed distance or from varying distances. For optimum speech understanding, the variable (adaptive) microphones can alter their pick-up distance based on environmental sound levels in the vicinity of the microphone. A cardinal rule regarding mics is that location matters! Placing a microphone either close to the speaker or in a position that will pick up the smallest area around the person or people that you want to hear is essential when attempting to combat background noise. In the case of a hearing device (such as a hearing aid or cochlear implant), mic location is predetermined, varying to some degree based on the device's style and type. Typically, the mic or mics within a hearing Instrument can be effective within a range of about five feet or so (the distance varies based on environmental conditions). If people are further away than this, moving closer to them or asking them to move closer to you can help. If moving is not possible, alternatives may be available within your programming or phone app settings. Sometimes, manipulating the device's microphone directionality can provide an added benefit.

One effective strategy for optimizing mic directionality is having a manual program installed that positions your hearing instrument mics to focus toward the narrowest possible forward position. This sometimes gets better results, especially in noisy environments. It is also possible in some cases to have a program installed that will focus your hearing instrument microphones toward a given sound source. This can be beneficial in a setting where people are behind you or speaking to you from various locations, particularly when you may not be facing them.

Every hearing instrument manufacturer refers to these types of programs differently, so it is best to consult your hearing healthcare provider for more information. As an example, Phonak refers to its narrow forward mic program as “Speech in Loud Noise” and its program that will move toward a sound source as “Speech in 360.”

This article was designed to give you insights into mic directionality and how it can be used to your advantage. My next article will build on this information and discuss ways to maximize assistive listening device microphones.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Recent Donors**

Jules Mermelstein  
Jessica Applebaum  
Hannah Mermelstein  
Ben Mermelstein

\*\*\*\*\*

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!**

Assist the HLAA-PA State Director by serving on the Advisory Council or one of its committees. The Council meets periodically at locations convenient to its membership. But committees conduct most of their business by e-mail and occasionally meet in various parts of the state. If you think you would like to serve on the council or any of its committees, please contact one of the state leaders listed here:

State Director: Nancy Kingsley ([kingsley@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:kingsley@hlaa-pa.org))  
Editor: HearSay and HLAA-PA Website Don Groff ([groff@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:groff@hlaa-pa.org))  
Advocacy: Nancy Kingsley, Chair ([kingsley@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:kingsley@hlaa-pa.org))  
Director of Marketing: Lee Williams ([leewilliams@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:leewilliams@hlaa-pa.org))  
Outreach Coordinator: Carolyn Meyer, Chair ([meyer@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:meyer@hlaa-pa.org))  
ALD Demo Kit: Bill Best, Chair ([best@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:best@hlaa-pa.org))  
Chapter Coordinators: Mike Miles, Eastern PA ([miles@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:miles@hlaa-pa.org)), Dale Long, Central PA ([long@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:long@hlaa-pa.org)), Teresa Nellans, Western PA ([nellans@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:nellans@hlaa-pa.org))

20201207