

GUEST COMMENTARY

Tax credits for hearing aids: A time which has come

Audiologist calls for action to make hearing treatment more affordable and accessible

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According to a recent survey of 56,000 households, Hearing Loss affects 1 in 10 Americans and 1 in 4 households.

While 95 percent of individuals with hearing loss could be successfully treated with hearing aids, only 23 percent currently use them.

One of the barriers to hearing aid adoption is affordability; two out of three people ages 55 and above with hearing loss report that affordability of hearing aids is a key reason for their inability to treat their hearing loss.

Recent bills in the house (HR 2329 – introduced by Reps. Carolyn McCarthy, NY and Vern Ehlers, MI) and Senate (S. 1410 – introduced by Senator Norm Coleman, MN) if passed could assist up to 1.2 million children and 11.5 million Americans 55 and above in treating their hearing loss.

These bills provide a tax credit of up to \$500 per hearing aid, available once every five years, toward the purchase of such hearing aid, and available to: 1) individuals age 55 and over, or 2) those purchasing a hearing aid for a dependent.

If utilized this equates to approximately a price reduction of 25–35 percent on the purchase of hearing aids. Hearing aids are not covered under Medicare, or under the vast

majority of state mandated benefits.

In fact, 73 percent of hearing aid purchases involve no third-party payments, placing the entire burden of the hearing aid purchase on the majority of consumers, according to several surveys of the hearing loss population.

Untreated, hearing loss can have many negative consequences. Those who struggle with hearing loss may be subject to subtle or even overt discrimination and be excluded from gatherings, conversations, and meetings.

The inability to communicate effectively can ultimately lead to frustration, anxiety, social isolation and depression.

Extensive research demonstrates that treatment with modern hearing aids bring measurable improvements in social, emotional, psychological, and physical well being, for both patients and their family members.

The good news is that, with treatment, those suffering even mild hearing loss can gain: Greater effectiveness on the job and better hearing power (An estimate of 65 percent of people with hearing loss are younger than retirement age); more participation in group activities like place of worship services; improved interpersonal relationships, greater intimacy and a better sense of control in professional, social and family gather-

ings; for school age children, improved performance in school and better development of language skills.

The fact is that better hearing is a critical aspect of effective communication. Hearing is crucial to developing meaningful relationships and the ability to enjoy life, whether it is participating fully in a conversation between friends, or enjoying aesthetic pleasures like music, the leaves rustling in the wind, or the cooing of a child.

Better hearing helps you to perform better, whether in business situations or engaging in hobbies or sports – all of life's activities that include a wealth of auditory cues and signals.

Better hearing also gives you an enhanced sense of security, and is critical where safety is a concern – for instance when caring for young children.

If you or a family member would like to benefit from a tax credit toward the purchase of hearing aids, the best thing you can do is write a personal letter to your congressperson and Senator urging support of House bill HR 2329 and Senate bill S1410.

The most effective letter would be the one written in your own words describing your personal situation and your need for hearing aids.

Contact information for your local Congressperson and Senator can be found on the follow-



ing web site www.congress.org/congressorg/home/"

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