



You and Your Hearing Health Professional

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

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Audiologist or Certified Instrument Specialist?

Audiologists

Audiologists are highly trained health care professionals qualified to do an extensive evaluation of your hearing. As of 2007, an Au.D. is required to become an audiologist. A professional who obtains this clinical doctorate is a “Doctor of Audiology,” but he or she is not a medical doctor. Audiologists who dispense hearing aids are familiar with multiple digital hearing aid software programs; this enables them to select the appropriate hearing aid and circuitry for your hearing loss.

Hearing Aid Dealers/Certified Hearing Instrument Specialists

Hearing aid dealers and *Certified Hearing Instrument Specialists* offer expertise in the fitting of hearing aids. They often receive their training as apprentices to hearing aid dealerships and take the appropriate coursework to receive their qualifications. But since they do not have post-graduate degrees in audiology, their focus is on hearing aids, not on the diagnostic services, aural rehabilitation or other areas where you will find audiologists. Hearing aid dealers must be licensed and registered in Virginia.

Making the Choice

Operating a professional practice requires that all dispensing audiologists and certified hearing instrument specialists receive continuing education from the manufacturers of the hearing aids they sell. Often, hearing aid dealers focus on one or two manufacturers of hearing aids while some audiologists dispense hearing aids from as many as seven or eight of the top manufacturers.

In recent years, hearing aids have become big business. It's important to look for a hearing health professional who is patient-driven, not sales-driven, someone who will inspire you to establish a long-term relationship with him or her. Your hearing loss will change over the years, and it's important to work with someone who can monitor the changes and provide you with the best hearing aid programs and fittings to suit your hearing loss and your budget.

Take someone with you for your first appointment! You will be receiving a lot of information and it's wise to have another person to take notes.

What Can I Expect from My Hearing Health Professional?

- **An interview in the first visit**, during which your professional will want to know your general medical history, prescriptions you are taking, when you first noticed your hearing loss, what types of listening situations are difficult for you, and what your overall goals are for better hearing. Your professional will want to be sure you have seen your physician within the past six months to rule out any possible medical condition that would be causing your hearing loss.

If you have NOT had a physical within the last six months, you will be asked to sign a waiver stating that you choose not to have a medical exam. This releases the hearing professional from any liability associated with dispensing hearing aids when there are unknown, underlying medical problems.

- **A look into your ear with an otoscope** to check the length and shape of the ear canal, look for wax build-up or other outer ear conditions that can be remedied.
- **A thorough hearing evaluation in a sound-proof booth** which will indicate the type and degree of your hearing loss
- **An explanation of the audiogram**, the graph on which all of the results of the tests are recorded. You should be given a copy of it to take home.
- **A description and demonstration** of the different styles and types of hearing aids that would be good for your hearing loss and fit your budget
- **An explanation of the costs** associated with the hearing aids, including fees involved in returning them. In the state of Virginia, you can return the aids within 30 days for a refund, but you should ask for 60 days. Manufacturers actually give dispensers 90 days, so you do have some room for negotiation. Return fees vary. Some hearing professionals charge as little as 4% of the cost of the aid, and others as much as 20%!
- **An explanation of the services included** in the cost of the hearing aids: how many return visits? Any free batteries? Is there a charge for the hearing test? The earmold?
- **An impression of your ear** to be sent to the manufacturer either for the earmold or for an in-the-ear style of hearing aid.
- **A sales contract** stating the professional's business policies, your rights as a buyer, full disclosure of the costs and fees, and the serial number of the hearing aid.

Before You Buy !!

- **Check out the dispenser** with the Better Business Bureau or Virginia Office of Consumer Affairs. Ask if there are any complaints on file and how the professional responded to the complaint.
- **Beware of 'the deal'!** If a dispenser pressures you with promises of deep discounts and/or a 'lifetime' of various services that's a good indication that he or she is sales-driven. Some audiologists and hearing aid dispensers are under contract to sell a certain number of hearing aids a year, putting their own interests ahead of yours.
- **Remember there is no "best" hearing aid!** Hearing loss is as unique as a fingerprint, so what works for one person will not necessarily work for someone else. Be cautious of a dispenser who claims that the hearing aids he or she sells are "the best." They may be for some people, but not for others. This is why it's advisable to work with a professional who sells several different manufacturers of hearing aids so you can compare them if you have to.

The Importance of Telecoils !!!

- Ask if the telecoil would be appropriate for your hearing loss! The telecoil is a small magnetic coil inside the hearing aid that bypasses background noise when you are using the telephone or an assistive listening device. You can activate it with the push of a button, and it gives you a whole new dynamic in listening.
- Many audiologists and hearing instrument specialists omit information about the telecoil. Often they either underestimate its importance, are not familiar with how to couple the telecoil with assistive listening devices, or they don't want to present the buyer with 'yet another feature' they will have to learn to use.