

## PREFACE

The Fall 1987 issue of the *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* presented a comprehensive review of sensory aids for hearing impairment. The demand for this special issue exceeded expectations and a second, larger printing was required. This issue was also widely disseminated throughout the world. Five years later, we are revisiting the topic in order to update knowledge in this rapidly changing area of rehabilitation.

It is noteworthy that, compared to the 1987 publication, the number of contributions from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-funded investigators in this current special issue has increased substantially. This reflects a significant and sustained increase in the emphasis on clinical and technology-oriented research by the VA's Rehabilitation Research and Development Service. The *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development* has had a major impact on strengthening this emphasis.

VA can take pride in its contributions to research, development, and clinical applications involving sensory aids for hearing impairment. For example, as early as the 1970s, VA supported the development of a digital hearing aid. Today, programmable hearing aids with digital components have become a viable clinical alternative to conventional hearing aids. VA is still actively engaged in supporting research and development in the clinical application of these instruments.

The cochlear implant is another major development in the field that is also strongly supported by VA. To date, the largest clinical study on cochlear implants has just been completed as part of VA's Cooperative Studies Program. Furthermore, regional clinical cochlear implant centers have been established throughout the VA health care system. In the long run, preventive care is more effective than remediation, and VA has been supportive of this type of research. Several VA-supported projects in this area are also reported in this special issue.

In terms of delivery of services, VA is the world's largest dispenser of hearing aids, with over 60,000 of these instruments annually being fitted in over 140 clinics. This system includes an annual, comprehensive, peer-based evaluation program for selecting and testing hearing aids. A component of this program is the electroacoustic testing of these hearing aids by the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

VA has joined forces with other organizations in sponsoring major conferences on amplification for hearing impairment. These activities have resulted in the dissemination of research findings, policy guidelines, and standards. Taken together, these contributions have influenced industry and the professions in ways that have benefited veterans as well as the general public.

During these times of austerity in public funding, VA has joined forces in sharing agreements with others to maximize treatment benefit for patients with outcome-oriented research and development. Numerous such arrangements for clinical services exist between VA and Department of Defense facilities throughout the United States. A major joint initiative for hearing aid research exists with the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

This special issue reflects current investigations with signal processing for hearing aids, technological aids, cochlear implants, and problems with hearing measurements. VA has enjoyed a significant role in nurturing many of these investigations through a rigorous process of merit review, funding support, and transfer to clinical applications. We are indebted to all those within VA and private sector professions who have contributed to the success of this publication.

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