



Henry Tobin, PhD
*Supervisor of Audiology, VA Medical Center,
Fort Howard, Maryland, recently retired.*

HENRY TOBIN, PhD, has 40 years of experience in audiology in academic and clinical settings. He has held academic posts at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio; Howard University, Washington, DC; and Gallaudet University, Washington, DC.

Recently retired from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Tobin was Supervisor of Audiology at the VA Medical Center, Fort Howard, Maryland, for the past 20 years. He received his Doctorate at Purdue University in Indiana.

Dr. Tobin is known for his treatment programs in audiologic habilitation and continues to emphasize this in private practice.

EDITORIAL

by Henry Tobin, PhD

In the early 1970s, audiologists were not yet permitted to be involved in the sale of hearing aids. The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) Committee on Audiologic Habilitation (a.k.a. Rehabilitative Audiology) recommended, through a position paper, that audiologists embark on the actual sale of hearing aids (1). ASHA, many fellow audiologists, and hearing aid dealers were strongly opposed to this recommendation. It took a court opinion in an unrelated case to establish this right.

The Committee did not make its recommendation for the purpose of selling hearing aids; but to create a delivery system that was in the best interest of those who had a hearing impairment. A careful reading of the position paper reveals that underlying the proposal was the belief that an audiologic habilitation (treatment) model was necessary for hearing aid selection and fitting (2). This is as relevant today as it was then. The more complicated things get, the more we need to depend on a treatment model that emphasizes the needs of people who have a hearing problem.

The hearing aid is going through radical changes. It is becoming progressively more nonlinear, programmable, and digital, as well as smaller. Where all this will lead, we are not yet sure. Just as we do not know how to establish hearing aid benefit (and maybe the hearing aid user does not know either), we do not yet know what the next generation of hearing aids will be like. This monograph is intended to be a source for accessing current thinking and approaches. It is not an attempt to provide the ultimate statement in hearing aid selection and fitting. The danger for the reader of any book on hearing aids is to believe he or she has the latest view in this complex and changing field. No sooner is a book published than newer and maybe better ideas are being developed.

We know that too few audiologists are active participants in the selection process. This monograph may be of use in helping audiologists to use their knowledge about their clients in successful hearing aid selection and fitting. We did not want a cookbook, but rather practical

approaches that would help the audiologist through the complexity of modern day selection and fitting considerations. The question we tried to answer is: what information does the audiologist need to be involved in the selection and fitting of the current array of hearing aids?

Hopefully, this monograph will serve as a reference for answering many of these questions. It certainly will provide strong points of view. We believe we have reviewed many ideas that are worth considering. There is no one best way; more likely, the only best way is dictated by the needs of the person with the hearing problem.

We take the position that hearing aid manufacturers are not better prepared to provide the best selection decision. The definitive answers necessary for our clients can only come from our concerned and educated audiologists. The audiologist knows the individual best, and can help in making the decisions that will lead to successful hearing aid selection and fitting. Formulae and algorithms alone will not solve the problem. The audiologist must meet the challenge. We have opportunities now that we never had before. We hope this monograph will help toward achieving the best that can be achieved for those we serve.

How we approach hearing aids has changed dramatically since the advent of the custom-made hearing aid (3). At one time, the term *hearing aid evaluation* had a special meaning and was done prior to the selection of a hearing aid. Now, it we are more likely to select the hearing aid first and *evaluate* our choice at the time of the fitting. We think this makes better sense, based on what we know today. The organization of the chapters reflects this approach.

REFERENCES

1. ASHA Committee of Rehabilitative Audiology. The audiologist: responsibilities in the habilitation of the auditorily handicapped. *ASHA* 1974;16:14-8.
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3. Hawkins DB. A historical perspective on hearing aid selection. *Hear Rev* 1994;1(10):9-12.