



Make Counseling More Effective

We all know the three most important words in real estate: Location, location, location. If we asked audiologists for their mantra, I'd expect "Counsel, counsel, counsel" to be somewhere in the top ten.

Even if you work with children only occasionally, you need to be prepared to review the results and counsel the parents—and often only one parent is present. We carefully go through the 'familiar sounds' audiogram, perhaps discuss the ramifications of a flat tympanogram or minimal conductive hearing loss, and make our recommendations. Can we expect the parent to adequately and accurately explain the audiogram to a spouse or discuss the communicative effects of a mild conductive loss to a daycare manager? It's likely they cannot. So, how can we make this process more effective for the parent, as well as the clinician?

Robert Margolis, PhD, professor of Audiology at the University of Minnesota Medical School, has investigated the process of informational counseling and patient recall. Dr. Margolis used to do what many of us have done: carefully design the clinic audiogram, include the speech area, and explain audiometric results and communicative effects of the hearing loss in clear language. Then one day it hit him—there must be a better way to help patients understand and remember the information.

His article, "Informational Counseling in Health Professions: What Do Patients Remember" (2004) points out, ironically, that "Audiology, a communication profession, has almost completely neglected to be concerned with the effectiveness of our communication of information to patients." His review of patient recall studies from the medical field reveals that, overall, about half of the information discussed with the patient is forgotten immediately and half of what is remembered is incorrect. The article concludes with a number of practical strategies to improve patient recall during counseling and recommends this guiding principal: "Any information that is important for the patient to

understand and remember should be provided in writing."

To that end, Dr. Margolis has developed the "Understanding" series of patient- and parent-friendly written materials, based on the belief that "the best counseling efforts are ineffective if the information is not provided in a format that can be read, reread, reviewed with family members, and re-reviewed after the memories of a verbal discussion are long forgotten." *Understanding Your Child's Hearing*® and *Understanding Your Baby's Hearing*® are excellent printed tools for audiologists to discuss with and give to parents. The colorful, four-page brochures include all the information you would review verbally in an informational counseling session. You can view all of Dr. Margolis' Understanding series (including two written for use with adults) and read his articles on patient recall and informational counseling at www.audiologyincorporated.com. Copies can be ordered through Oaktree Products.

Understanding Your Baby's Hearing is designed for use by hospital hearing screening programs and by audiologists. Topics include Causes of Hearing Loss in Babies, Risk Factors, Developmental Milestones, Testing Methods, Treatment of Hearing Loss in Babies, and Educational Options. Space is provided for test results, interpretation, and recommendations.

Understanding Your Child's Hearing includes a unique color-coded diagram of the ear and color-keyed discussion that ties the text to the related anatomic regions and audiometric ranges. It also provides a blank, color-coded audiogram for the audiologist to complete and guides the parent through the discussion of the nature and extent of the hearing loss. The recommendations page, shown here, is easy for the audiologist to complete and clear for the parent to understand.

As professionals, we take time and care in explaining results to parents. Knowing that it's possible that they may not accurately remember the information, the use of written materials like those developed by Dr. Margolis provides us with effective tools to improve the success of our counseling with parents. \$

Maureen Doty Tomasula, MA, CCC-A, FAAA is pediatric marketing manager at Oticon Inc.; she may be reached at 800-227-3921, ext. 2507, mdd@oticonus.com.

oticon
PEOPLE FIRST

Information sponsored by Oticon Inc., www.oticonus.com