## ADVANCE for Audiologists

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## **ALD Applications**

## Tell Patients About Their Telecoils

By Stephen O. Frazier

"Our meeting room has an induction loop system. If you have a t-switch, turn on the telecoils in your hearing aids and you'll hear the speaker much more clearly."

That's the announcement at the opening of every Hearing Loss Association of Albuquerque meeting. It's always followed by these questions from first-time visitors: "What's a telecoil? Do my hearing aids have a t-switch?"

We explain telecoils and how they work with the loop system in the room. Then one of us looks over their hearing aids and, more often than not, tells the visitors they have telecoils and a t-switch. Then they ask, "Why wasn't I told about telecoils?"

Only their hearing care providers can answer that question. We believe everyone with hearing aids needs telecoils and should be told how they can help them to hear and understand in situations where hearing aid microphones may not be enough.

First-time users of a loop also tell us they are amazed at how much better they can hear. One, not a first-time visitor, had just replaced his old, non-telecoilequipped hearing aids with new aids with telecoils. After the meeting he said, "This is the first time in three years attending meetings that I understood everything the speaker said." Another said, after moving here, she went to her church for 5 years for the fellowship because she couldn't hear the sermon. Now that the church is looped, she hears and participates fully in the service.

We've been told by users that they can now watch, hear and understand TV without turning up the volume so high that it drives others from the room. Others say, using a neck loop, they don't have to find a quiet location before they can make a call on their cell phone

We once wondered if it was just local hearing care providers who were ignoring these important accoutrements to hearing aids, but we've discovered it happens all over the United States. Carren Stika, PhD, and Mark Ross, PhD, two nationally known hearing care experts, conducted a study that found only 48 percent of audiologists and 42 percent of hearing aid dispensers make certain their clients understand the T-switch. Even when they did explain how it works with a telephone, just under 34 percent of audiologists and only 28 percent of dispensers discussed assistive hearing devices and technologies beyond the hearing aids.

To address this situation we started our own New Mexico initiative (*HLAAbq.com/LoopNM.html*). Like David Myers' pioneering Let's Loop America (*hearingloop.org/loopamerica.htm*), Tuscon's Loop Tucson (*alohaaz.org/lets\_loop\_tucson.html*) and other groups, we are attemptingto raise the awareness of both the hard of hearing and of hearing care professionals to the benefits of this neglected but very effective technology that adds so little to the cost of hearing aids but so much to the quality of life for those who use it.

In Great Britain, loop systems in public meeting places, churches, transportation hubs and even retail business are as common as the ubiquitous PA system or the omnipresent background music—the first often useless to the hard of hearing and the second just annoying to those with hearing loss. We would like to see the same abundance of induction loop systems in this country.

Through our initiative, a growing number of churches and other facilities in Albuquerque have installed induction loops. Two of the largest, most popular concert venues have purchased and loan out neck loops that convert the signal from their earlier installed infrared system to a magnetic signal that can be picked up by the telecoil in hearing aids, corrected for that particular individual's hearing loss, and sent on as clear, crisp sound.

People suffering from hearing loss are buying their own systems and looping their living rooms for better TV viewing or, in some cases, looping their entire home. They're buying neck loops to plug into cell phones for hands free use—getting the added benefit of sending sound to both ears while getting rid of most background noise. They use those neck loops with hot new tech toys like the IPod. Some have even looped their cars!

Audiologists who promote this technology have found they have patients who are happier because of the added benefits they're getting from their hearing aids. Some, such as Bill Diles, MA, in Sonoma County, CA or Carol Clifford, AuD, FAAA, here in Albuquerque, even bundle a room loop for TV watching with each pair of hearing aids they dispense. They report dramatically fewer hearing aid returns when they train their clients in the use of the telecoil and explain induction loops to them. They also loop an always running but otherwise silent TV in their waiting area and loop exam rooms.

Dr. Clifford often tells of a family that was so excited they could have movie night again when their TV room was looped after their daughter got new hearing aids. The daughter thought it was the coolest thing ever and plans on getting one for her dorm room when she goes off to college.

As a former retailer, I see this situation as an opportunity for hearing care providers to not only better serve their clients, but to improve their bottom line. Albuquerque has a local retailer named *All Things Said*, who stocks and sells loop systems and peripherals using this technology but, for most Americans, this equipment is available only on the Web or via catalog.

Dispensing offices can purchase induction-loop-related items for resale to clients from manufacturers and distributors such as Wireless Hearing Solutions, Pure Direct Sound and Oval Window Audio, all of whom can be accessed on the Internet. These sources can also provide guidance on how to find a local installer for room and whole house loops for those clients who do not feel technically able to do the installation themselves.

For those hearing care professionals who simply don't want to get that deeply involved in loop technology, we urge them to, at the very least, thoroughly discuss the benefits of telecoils and induction loops with their clients and give them a resource guide to such catalog/Internet retailers as Harris Communications or Weitbrecht Communications where they can purchase these invaluable adjuncts to their state-of-theart digital hearing aids.

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