

Phonak Insight

Taking theory to practice: Integrating Phonak eAudiology into clinical practice

Technologically connected hearing healthcare, termed eAudiology, is reshaping how hearing care professionals connect with their clients. In this article, two early adopters, Dr. Lauren Aramini and Dr. Jeff Lane, share their experiences introducing eAudiology into their practices.

Jacqueline Drexler, Au.D., December 2019

Introduction

Digital transformation is occurring in healthcare and it is having a significant effect on clinical practice and client care. Approximately 76% of hospitals in the United States connect with clients and consulting practitioners remotely through the use of video and other technology.¹ This shift in healthcare partly stems from changes in society and the drive for greater convenience. The clients themselves are more active, health conscious, inquisitive, and expressing greater autonomy in making decisions in regards to their own healthcare.^{2, 3, 4}

Even further, clients are increasingly tech-savvy. A Pew Research Center survey found that more than 5 billion people worldwide have mobile devices, and over half of these devices are smartphones.⁵ Smartphone ownership is not restricted to younger adults. For example, in the United States, smartphone adoption among adults ages 50 and

older has risen from 53% to 67% since 2015.⁵ When looking around at those with their smartphones out, there is no difference between the 55 year old and the 18 year old teenager sitting beside them.

The traditional model of delivering hearing healthcare is face-to-face, which typically involves an assessment, a fitting, and then a fine-tuning appointment. However, we need to be sure we are keeping up with demographic trends. These trends show consumers want more for less, and to make their own evidence-based decisions.^{2,3} In addition, changes in government regulations will allow for more device and service delivery options for clients, including the presence of over-the-counter products.⁶ Consumers want a service approach personalized to their individual needs, and holistic hearing care, where they can interact with their hearing care professionals (HCPs), in a manner convenient for them.

Implementation of eAudiology can allow clients increased access to HCPs and add value to a clinical practice. eAudiology incorporates information, technologies and services that enable remote provision of audiologic care at each stage along the client journey.⁷ Phonak eSolutions consists of a suite of smart apps and solutions to support implementation of eAudiology in clinical practice. Phonak eSolutions seamlessly and securely connect HCPs with their clients.

This all sounds good in theory, but how will this affect the way business is run for HCPs, and how do they get started? Is eAudiology for everyone?

Insights from early adopters

Dr. Lauren Aramini from Accura Audiology in Buffalo, NY and Dr. Jeff Lane from Trinity Hearing Center in Northern Arizona share their insights and experiences as early adopters of eAudiology in the United States. They have implemented eAudiology services into the delivery of hearing care in a manner that utilizes best practices, and leads to clinical efficiency and high service value.

Here they share some of their key learnings.

1. Tell me about your clinical background and audiology practice?

Lauren Aramini (L.A.): I have been at Accura Audiology since August 2010. I received my Doctor of Audiology degree from the University at Buffalo.

My specialties include audiometric evaluations, vestibular assessments and treatment, and the fitting and programming of hearing aids.

Jeff Lane (J.L.): I began working at Trinity Hearing Center in June 2018. I received my Doctor of Audiology degree from Arizona State University.

2. Why did you decide to implement eAudiology services into your clinical practice?

L.A.: To differentiate ourselves from other practices we look for extra perks for clients to make the most of their hearing journey. The technology is fantastic, but part of it too is the service and what you can add to enhance the experience. This is where providing eAudiology services come in.

J.L.: Our clinic is unique in the sense that being in northern Arizona, it's very spread out. This is in contrast to Phoenix or Tucson where it's very metropolitan. In northern

Arizona we have clients that live two hours away in different towns. For them it is nice to offer eAudiology services because they don't have to drive all this way just for a five minute appointment.

3. At which point in the clinical pathway do you present eSolutions to your clients?

L.A.: We talk about eSolutions with every single client. We mention there is the myPhonak app you can download to keep track of your listening concerns and experience. It also helps us as the audiologist. We have an idea of how they're doing even before they come in for their appointment, "to give us a heads up".

If they're interested, we have them download the myPhonak app and set them up while they're in the office. Then, we schedule an appointment to do a remote support test run. Once they see it in action, they are just amazed by what we can offer.

J.L.: We present eSolutions as an option when we're discussing hearing aids. It interests a lot of people, especially the ones who live far away. They say, "Oh, I wish I could come to you. You are a great person to work with, but it's so far away." It's like, "Oh, well, you don't have to worry about that because we can use eSolutions."

As far as downloading the myPhonak app to their phone and the setup, we wait until the first follow-up after they're fit. We let them take a week or two to acclimate to the hearing aids. Once they're more familiar with them, we download the myPhonak app and set it up for the clients in the office. They seem to grasp onto the app really well and enjoy what it offers.

4. How do you determine candidacy for eAudiology?

L.A.: If clients are interested in learning a new piece of equipment, then they are a candidate. We let the clients decide for themselves.

J.L.: We treat everybody as a candidate, as long as they own or have access to a smartphone or a tablet. For the majority of clients we present it to them and say: "This is an option that we have. Is this something that you're interested in?" Most clients say "Yes". There are however some older clients where technology isn't their 'bread and butter'.

5. How do you see remote support influencing your scheduling and/or staffing needs?

L.A.: We treat remote support sessions the same way we treat face-to-face encounters. We actually find it best to schedule remote sessions in the beginning of the day, during lunch hour, or towards the end of the day.

We also find it beneficial to have an audiology assistant be the one to instruct the clients on how to download the myPhonak app, set up the remote support session, and assist with troubleshooting, if any connection issue arises.

J.L.: We schedule remote support like we would any other appointment. Rather than coming in to the clinic, you're doing it over the phone.

6. What remote support learnings would be helpful to know prior to using this tool?

L.A.: To ensure a stable remote support connection, it is important the clients have the latest software update on their mobile phone, enough phone battery life, and a strong WIFI connection. Any other apps that may be running in the background should be closed as they can slow down the connection.

We remind clients that a remote support session is no different than a face-to-face encounter, and to be mindful that the mobile phone camera will be active during the session. It is a good idea to do a test run with the client in the office to ensure the setup works.

J.L.: To add to this, the client should not hang up or walk away from the phone before the fitting session is saved. We remind clients, "No matter where you go, make sure you take me with you." Otherwise, any fine tuning adjustments will not be saved and re-establishing connection between the hearing aids and the fitting software will be challenging.

7. Are follow-up fittings ever performed specifically in the listening environment of concern? Are they successful at addressing client goals?

L.A.: We find in-situ programming to be successful as the client is able to provide immediate feedback on the adjustments made in real-time.

J.L.: We have performed in-situ programming while the client was at home, in the car, in the coffee shop or at the gym. In-situ programming gives a more accurate picture of the client's real-world listening environments as we can actually see and hear what their environments look like.

I had a case where a client reported sound quality issues when playing racquetball. As I had never been to a racquetball court, it was a great opportunity to do a remote support session in that exact environment. I could see and hear the client's environment, and make accurate fine-tuning adjustments. The client provided immediate feedback on the changes made.

8. Compared to a face-to-face encounter, how satisfied are clients who utilize remote support? How satisfied are you with remote support?

L.A.: My clients are just as satisfied when using remote support compared to a face-to-face encounter. Remote Support is easy to use and offers a service that makes life easier for them. I can meet the needs of my clients equally whether it is through a remote support session or in a face-to-face encounter.

J.L.: I find my clients to be more satisfied when utilizing remote support as it offers convenience for them. Remote support does not replace face-to-face encounters, but it is another service clients can take advantage of and still receive the same quality of care.

9. How do you see eAudiology adding value to the services you deliver to your clients?

L.A.: We have clients who travel quite the distance, and it helps save a trip, a gas tank. We still have the personal aspect of building a relationship with the clients because we still see them, while offering a service convenient for them.

J.L.: Offering eAudiology allows us to fit a wider range of clients who live further away from the office, have commuting difficulties or mobility issues. Providing in-situ programming in clients' real-world listening environments has been beneficial in obtaining immediate feedback. It's not always easy for clients to get here, but we can make it easier for them by offering follow-up care remotely.

10. Do you see eAudiology as a long term solution for your practice and your clients?

L.A.: Absolutely. It's something that is always going to be available to us, and we will continue to use it for every single client that wants it and feels like they can handle it.

J.L.: It's definitely something that we will continue to use and implement in our practice.

Conclusion

We thank Dr. Lauren Aramini and Dr. Jeff Lane for taking the time to share their learnings and experiences with us. We are entering into an era where audiological care can be obtained in different ways to meet the unique needs of clients.

Some learnings Dr. Aramini and Dr. Lane shared with us include allowing clients to decide for themselves if they are a candidate for eSolutions. Clients want to be empowered to make their own decisions, including whether or not to utilize eSolutions as part of their hearing

journey. Even further, Dr. Aramini and Dr. Lane, as well as their clients are satisfied with the level and quality of care provided by eSolutions compared to a face-to-face encounter. With eSolutions, there is still an opportunity to maintain client trust and a personalized relationship.

Technologically connected healthcare is here to stay, and it's exciting to see audiologists embrace this and successfully implement eAudiology into the clinical pathway, as it offers new opportunities for the consumer, the HCP and the business.

For further information about [Phonak eSolutions](#), please visit [Phonak eAudiology](#).

Stay tuned as *Taking theory to practice* will be a new series on the Phonak Audiology Blog. Audiologists will share their expertise on various audiological topics and best practices for clinical implementation.

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Authors and experts

Author

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Jacqueline received her Doctorate of Audiology from the University at Buffalo in New York. She gained diverse experience in clinical practice before joining Sonova in 2017. Within Sonova, she has held various roles, and is currently an Audiology Manager at Phonak HQ,

Switzerland. She is also a bimodal user with a cochlear implant in the right ear and a hearing aid in the left. In her free time, Jacqueline enjoys being outdoors.

Subject matter experts

Jeff Lane, Au.D.



Dr. Lane has been with Trinity Hearing Center since June 2018. D graduated from Northern Arizona University with a Bachelor of Arts degree. He went on to receive his Doctor of Audiology degree from Arizona State University in 2018.

Dr. Lane provides diagnostic and hearing aids services for adult and pediatric patients, along with disability evaluations for veterans. He believes in a holistic approach to audiology and values building relationships with patients.

Lauren Aramini, Au.D.



Dr. Lauren Aramini has been at Accura Audiology since August 2010, where she completed her clinical training with the private practice. She graduated from Truman State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Disorders and

Sciences in 2008. She went on to receive her Doctor of Audiology degree from the University of Buffalo in 2012. Dr. Aramini is originally from the Chicago area but has made Buffalo her home with her husband, daughter, and golden retriever named Wrigley.

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