



Why You Should Recommend Hearing Loss Support Groups to Your Patients

by Sheri Eberts

Hearing loss can be a solitary experience. You often miss the punch line of the joke and look around in confusion while everyone else is laughing. You are embarrassed to ask your friend to repeat herself for the third time so you just nod along and pretend you heard her instead. Significant concentration is required to follow conversations, leading to hearing loss exhaustion and general fatigue. Sometimes people with hearing loss decide socializing is not worth the effort and choose to isolate themselves. They start to avoid parties and intimate time with friends and family. This was the case for me.

Meeting other people with hearing loss through a hearing loss support group changed all that. I found peers who could relate to my hearing loss experiences, commiserate with my problems and

provide advice and best practices for navigating a variety of communication situations. I discovered caption readers at the movies and open-captioned performances at the theater. I learned about my rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and how to self-advocate for the accommodations I needed to help me hear.

I realized I was not alone in my struggles. I felt empowered and less afraid. I began to accept my hearing loss and realized that I could live a good life despite its challenges. My new hearing loss friends inspired me to become a hearing loss advocate and to share the ups and downs of my life with hearing loss on my blog LivingWithHearingLoss.com. By sharing my story, I hope to help others live more comfortably with their own hearing issues.

Camaraderie, friendship and emotional support are important for anyone facing a new challenge. Hearing loss is no different. Audiologists and hearing aid dispensers are often the first people those with hearing loss turn when searching for information about their condition. Share facts and analytical information, but understand that the emotional aspects of hearing loss are equally important to treat. You can help do that by referring your patients to a hearing loss support group in your area or by starting one yourself.

Several hearing loss support groups exist.

1. Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) is the largest, operating many local chapters throughout the United States and hosting a large annual convention for its members. HLAA chapters have local leadership such that each has its own unique flavor.
2. The Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA) operates a handful of local support groups and hosts an annual convention for its members. Its primary focus is on people who developed hearing loss later in life.
3. Say What Club operates mostly online, but does host an annual in-person convention.
4. A.G. Bell provides local support groups for families of children with hearing loss and dedicated support groups for teens with hearing loss. They also host an annual convention.

5. Virtual support groups are abundant on Facebook, each with a unique focus. Join a few to see what issues are important to people with hearing loss and to share your expertise.

Hearing care professionals are welcome to attend the monthly meetings of most hearing loss support groups and I recommend that you do so regularly. Listen carefully to the concerns and discussion topics to learn more about the experience of hearing loss from the patient's perspective. You may discover new technologies or cutting edge apps that you can recommend to your patients. The more you know, the better care you can provide.

Volunteer to speak at a monthly meeting, on a webinar or at an annual convention. Sharing your expertise will help many people with hearing loss and generate goodwill for your practice. Your standing in the hearing loss community will be enhanced, leading to referrals and more opportunities for collaboration over time.

About the Author

Shari Eberts is a hearing health advocate, writer, and avid Bikram yogi. She blogs at LivingWithHearingLoss.com and serves on the Board of Trustees of Hearing Loss Association of America. Shari has an adult-onset genetic hearing loss and hopes that by sharing her story it will help others to live more peacefully with their own hearing issues.