



# A New APP-peal for Getting Patients Through Your Door

By Erica Hansen and Randi Davis

**T**he summer is heating up and so is talk about the applications of smartphones for hearing aids. With new product launches this year, there are more options than ever for getting patients connected to the acoustic world. Two important questions arise:

- Will the integration of smartphone technology increase the uptake for those seeking hearing aids?
- How can we best avail ourselves of these new connectivity options to increase patient satisfaction and strengthen our practices?

The number of hearing-related apps is growing, and if trends continue, more are on the way. MFI, or “made for iPhone” hearing aids provide our patients with connectivity galore by allowing instruments to audio stream directly from the phone to the hearing instruments. Without an intermediary device, unwanted attention when making adjustments to volume is eliminated. For those who previously needed to make a program change before taking a call, the process is simplified. There is less of a need for a TV accessory when streamlining movies watched on an iPad or iPod, and direct transmission of programs like FaceTime provide obvious advantages, such as

visual cues. These devices are topped off with Apple extras, such as the option of locating a lost hearing aid, GPS and motion-triggered settings, or geotagging features. Last, but not least, smartphones open the door to apps that aid as aural rehab tools.

We know all too well that hearing aid adoption rates have been historically low and stagnant since the early 1980s (Amlani and Taylor, 2012). Hearing aids offer an opportunity to improve quality of life, yet in the United States, only 20 percent of those who could benefit from hearing aids seek treatment. These are consistently lower adoption rates than occur with more visible rehabilitative technologies such as eyeglasses or

wheelchairs. Additionally, those who do seek treatment have waited, on average, ten years to be fit with their first hearing aid (Davis et al, 2007).

In contrast, smartphone usage has reportedly exhibited the highest adoption trends of any consumer technology in history (Farago, 2012). Recent statistics estimate that 91 percent of the American adult population now owns a cell phone and 61 percent are classified as smartphone users (Smith, 2013). Predictions suggest that ownership of smartphones is still on the rise.

As these new technologies unfold, here are some tips to keep in mind.:

### Stay Tech Savvy and Up-To-Date

Hearing-related apps have been awarded recent attention in popular publications such as the *New York Times* and CNN.com. Be ready to field questions and explain the latest features available for smartphone technology.

### Pay Close Attention to What Motivates Your Patients

While we may be focused on audio-logical needs, other factors may drive our patients. The high tech look of a new generation device helps to keep the focus away from mortality and aging and potentially has great appeal to baby boomers.

### Do Not Limit Discussion By Age or Demographics

Age, gender, and socioeconomic statuses are not necessarily limiting factors for individuals who use this technology. The fastest growing demographic for smartphone users is between the ages of 55 and 64. Additionally, it is estimated that 74 percent of people over 65 own a cell phone. Of these users, 21 percent have used their phones to video chat, and 48 percent have used their phones to listen to music (Smith, 2013).

### Consider the Aural Rehab Possibilities

Technology alone will not improve the adoption rates of hearing aids, as evidenced by previous advancements such as analog-to-digital technology. Rehabilitation that demonstrates evidence-based benefit to the patient is more effective. App-based aural rehab increases potential for accessibility and convenience in attaining these programs.

### Conclusion

The merging of medical and popular consumer technology continues to reduce the stigma associated with hearing aids, and it is likely people may start seeking help sooner. First data indicates that the integration of smartphone and hearing aid technology has been well received (Reuters, 2014). Perceived benefit to users is evident with smartphone applications. When it comes to increasing patient satisfaction and strengthening our clinical practices, “there is an app for that,” as the cliché goes. 📱

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