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Audiologists Take Care to Beneficiaries

Bernard S. Little | Command Information Officer

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Taking care to beneficiaries is the philosophy behind a program that has an audiologist and audiology intern from Walter Reed going to the Armed Forces Retirement Home twice a month to provide hearing screenings, hearing aid services, counseling, and aural rehabilitation to the home residents.

The program began in March, and since then Dr. Jessica Scott and 1st Lt. Latisha Scott have provided care to nearly 100 AFRH residents in its wellness center and other locations at the home for former members of the U.S. military in northwest D.C.

Scott, the Walter Reed audiologist, explained a reason for the program is to provide a convenience for residents of the home, many who have mobility concerns and find it challenging to come to Walter Reed's audiology clinic, or go to the audiology clinic at the Washington D.C. VA Medical Center for care.

She said another reason for the program is because many AFRH residents now have a longer wait for hearing screenings and simple hearing aid repairs at Walter Reed because of the increase in hearing injuries to active duty troops as a result of their duty in Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.



"The need [for the program] was identified by the Walter Reed audiology clinical staff based on the number of [AFRH residents] that were coming in the hearing aid repair lab at Walter Reed for simple repairs," Scott said.

Lieutenant Scott, who has been going to the AFRH with Dr. Scott since March when the program began, is a fourth-year audiology student and provides hearing screenings to its residents.

They explained what they are finding most often with the screenings is that residents are finding it difficult to communicate in social settings, such as in the cafeteria or when watching television because of background noise interference.

In addition to decreasing background noise as much as possible when communicating with others, Dr. Scott offered other strategies people can develop to improve their communication.

Scott explained that communication is an interactive process between the speaker and the listener which frequently require role reversal. That is the speaker may eventually become the listener, and vice versa.

When counseling AFRH residents on how they can improve their hearing and communication, Scott encourages them to use environmental, situational and conversational strategies such as:

- facing the individual with whom you are speaking with, and have that person face you when speaking;
- not covering your mouth with your hands or other objects, such as an eating utensil or glass when speaking, and encouraging others not to do the same when they are speaking with you;
- speaking at a good audible level and encourage others to do the same;
- using adequate lighting so that you can see the person you are speaking with, which helps hearing better.

Scott said some hearing loss may come with age and a person's military occupation, but people should still have their hearing screened on a regular basis. She explained some people are hesitant about having their hearing screened and wearing a hearing aid because they feel those are signs of age, but good hearing improves communication and one's quality of life.

"Since starting this service [at AFRH], we have identified several patients with hearing loss that would benefit from amplification," Scott said.

Scott explained that if she feels a resident would benefit for further testing than what the Walter Reed staff is able to provide during their visit to the AFRH, they recommend the patient for more sophisticated screening at Walter Reed or the VA.

"Some of these individuals have pursued this option through Walter Reed or the VA," Scott said. "For those who already have hearing aids, our goal is to ensure their devices are working properly and that they have knowledge and skills to receive optimal benefit from their hearing aids.

"We feel that this service has enhanced the quality of life for many of the AFRH residents, improving their communication abilities," Scott said.