

The newsletter of the Hearing Loss Association of America, Albuquerque Chapter

WIRED FOR SOUND

Review of March Meeting About Apps

Mary Clark, HLAA Albuquerque

On Saturday March 19 we were fortunate to have Ann Thomas share her expertise on Smart Phone apps. Her talk was entitled “Apps, the New Assistive Listening Devices”.

She first covered how many features of hearing aids can be controlled by the user. Not all manufacturers offer all of these options, but for example, you can change the volume of the hearing aids, individually, or as a pair. You can customize the microphone/telecoil (M/T) ratio when using a telecoil and microphone setting. This allows the user to turn the microphone setting up or down, in order to optimize the sound with the T-coil. Some hearing aid apps can control the volume of the telecoil itself in addition to the standard microphone, even when being used alone. The app can be used to switch between programs, the same as using the buttons on the devices themselves.

The topic of Speech-to-Text apps was a big favorite and is clearly a favorite topic of our presenter, as well. Ann was a very early adopter of the AVA app, and still favors that one over others, for a variety of reasons. The AVA app can work almost like a telephone, and two people can have a conversation from distant locations. This feature is ideal when there are multiple speakers, if each speaker is also using



AVA. Not only will the entire group discussion be transcribed, but each speaker will be identified by name even when they are not in the same room.

The technology to transcribe voice to text automatically is called Automated Speech Recognition (ASR). You’ve probably seen examples of this on television from time to time, when the captions seem to stop making sense, or they will garble or misinterpret words. These kinds of errors are less likely when using live captioning like we do at our meetings, and even during our zoom meetings.

A tip she shared was one I hadn’t considered but seems obvious once she told us. Most cell phones have the microphone at the bottom of the phone, so when trying to use a speech-to-text app with another person, it will work better when the microphone is closer to the other speaker. So, turning the cell phone “upside down” helps the apps work much better for conversational use in noisy background. It also impresses the clerk at the grocery

store if you are trying to talk to them, and explain that you have this cool app that will help you understand them in spite of masks or difficulty hearing.

The other speech-to-text apps Ann mentioned include Live

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is published by the
HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
ALBUQUERQUE CHAPTER
Providing support and advocacy for
people with hearing loss

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9 Apr Meeting 10:00 AM - Noon On **Zoom**

To avoid conflicts with the speaker's schedule, our April meeting will be a week early. For anyone who misses it, we plan to have a makeup on the 16th with the recording of the live meeting, and a way to ask questions.

Although COVID case rates have abated, we will continue meeting on Zoom in April. Our Web Page (HearingLossAbq.org) will have updates and the link to join the Zoom meeting.

Cochlear Implants—Part 2

Speaker: Camile Dunn, PhD



Few scientific advances have improved the quality of life of people with hearing and communication disorders more than cochlear implants. Nevertheless, it has been a complex process to develop these prostheses, test how they work in the real world and deepen our scientific understanding of how they impact people's ability to hear and communicate. Through the development of various surgical and electrode options, new populations of both adults and children are being considered for cochlear implantation (Part 1).

In April, Part 2 will describe what happens at a cochlear implant evaluation and various real-world outcomes from cochlear implant users. The audience will have a better understanding of what to expect during the process of candidacy determination and how the CI might influence quality of life and other psychosocial outcomes.

Dr. Camille Dunn Joined the Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Iowa in 2003, where she is an Assistant Professor and the Director of the Cochlear Implant Program.

Check our Home Page, HearingLossAbq.com, for the latest information on upcoming programs.

The HLAA ABQ Chapter is always looking for volunteers. You can man a special project. You can help us out for a few months, or consider a longer-term commitment. "Try us out" for a month or two. We will provide orientation for working on a nonprofit board, share our chapter's mission and goals, and discuss topics we can use your help with. If interested, contact any board member (contact info at left), or use the chapter email hlaabq@gmail.com.

Caption, Otter and Live Transcribe. (Although there is an Apple version of Live Transcribe, it works much better on Android phones.) I would like to add one more to the list called Speechy, which works on both Android and Apple (IOS) phones. I like Speechy in situations when you need to start captioning quickly or on short notice. The only steps to start using it is to open the app and then press the microphone icon, and it starts translating speech-to-text right away. Some of the other apps require more steps to get the actual text to start displaying.

A question was asked about captioning cell phone calls. The ones that were mentioned were InnoCaption and Caption Call. These will display the text from the other end of the call but will not display what YOU are saying. A new app called Olelo is said to show captions for both sides of the conversation.

I have also heard that if you happen to need to use a live meeting app (zoom, or Google Meets) and the captions are horrible, or even not enabled by the speaker, you can place your smart phone next to your computer and turn on the speech-to-text app, and you can follow better using those captions.

The next topic was how smart phones can be a lifesaver in emergency situations. Ann shared a program called Smart911. If you look it up on line at smart911.com you can enter your zip code and find out if the local emergency response services in your area are subscribed. These services can be provided by the city, town, village, county or other municipal jurisdiction. I actually tried this and signed up someone I am responsible for, so that if EMT are called to his home, they will have a more

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comprehensive medical history for him than he is capable of providing on his own. Another safety-oriented app is called BeWarned. This is technically an alerting app which can distinguish environmental sounds that would indicate danger—someone knocking on the door, a phone ringing, or a fire alarm or police sirens, for example.

Ann's recommendation was to take the apps one at a time, especially for those new to smart phones. Using the simplest apps for captioning speech to text might be the Speechy app, but once you are familiar enough with the smart phone, using AVA offers a lot more flexibility and can accommodate multiple participants in the same dialogue, as long as all the parties are also using AVA.

One thing we were reminded of is that hard of hearing people are among the least likely to actually file a complaint with the Department of Justice (DOJ) when a violation of ADA accommodations is experienced. Advocacy is a responsibility that all of us needs to step up to and do more of.

A parting thought that Ann shared was an important one. When you hear about developments for new projects that will help those with hearing loss, it's important to make sure that those with hearing loss are actually represented on those development teams. I loved the phrase: "Nothing about us – without us".

Thank you, Ann, for a great review of how to turn our phones into assistive listening devices!

Amazon Smile You can donate to the Albuquerque Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America every time you make a purchase of most of the products from Amazon.

Go to <http://www.hlaabq.com/amazonmile.html> for more information and detailed instructions on how to designate HLAA-ABQ Chapter as your charity of choice when you make amazon.com purchases.

Once you have set it up, always log into smile.amazon.com to purchase from amazon. 0.5% of the purchase price is automatically donated to HLAA Albuquerque Chapter—at no cost to you.

Loop people, loop places

Ginevra Ralph

Old Guys Book Club

As a university town, Eugene, OR has our fair share of retired professors. A fair share of them have hearing loss, of course, whether or not their spouses have convinced them of that yet! Virtually all of them want to remain deeply involved in academic discussions, lifelong learning opportunities, and civic engagement.

Even pre-pandemic, one friend complained that the men in his Old Guys Book Club were hard to hear. They spoke either “too softly or not clearly enough”, and a couple of them also have Parkinson’s, which, along with other conditions, can make it honestly difficult for them to “speak up”. As they distanced their book group ever further, moved outdoors, and wore masks, active participation for Jim was virtually impossible.

So he experimented with one of the portable loops and a plug-in, “omni-directional”, microphone that has a 10-foot cord. It picks up sound

within about a 12-foot radius. He placed the mic on a table in the center of the Book Club circle, sometimes closer to the fellows with the softest voices, and has since been able to hear all the conversation. Now a second member does the same with his own personal loop! They simply take their loops with them to wherever the meeting is being held that month.

This is such a clear example of how critical it is for our friends to stay engaged with colleagues and community. As a society we can’t afford to lose the collective “brain trust” that these folks, as well as other community members, provide simply because we don’t support them creatively enough to hear well in all of their social and business environments.

Now these “old guys” are advocating for a loop in their Learning in Retirement classroom and in their apartment conference room. If we “loop people” they will in turn “loop places” for everybody to use!



You can learn about the latest technologies and advances in hearing health at the [HLAA Convention](#).

You can go to Tampa for these [Convention Educational Workshops](#). The [JW Marriott Tampa Water Street](#) is offering a discounted rate.

Here are some of the interesting workshops you can look forward to:

- Importance of Genetic Testing for Hearing Loss
- Hearing Loops and Bluetooth Accessories: Benefits of Wireless Connectivity

- Let’s Get Real: Advocating for Ourselves
 - Collaborative Efforts to Strengthen Telecommunication Effectiveness and Accessibility
 - Manufacturer Panel: Hearing Aid Innovation
- Visit the online [schedule](#) to learn more about social events, the Exhibit Hall, a research symposium on cochlear implants and more!

Go to [HearingLoss.org](#) to learn more or register, or follow the links above in [blue](#).

Yearly dues are \$15 per household.
They are due in January.

Thanks to those listed below for their generous donations.

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