

AVAA Amplifier

Summer 2020



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Special points of interest:

- President's Message
- Advocacy
- Board Update
- Pets of AVAA



President's Message

One of the greatest aspects of being a VA Audiologist is that we are all able to provide comprehensive, high quality hearing healthcare services to Veterans without any limitations. Since the birth of our profession following World War II, the VA continues to be a pioneer across many domains. We see the contributions the VA makes on a daily basis whether it is in our standard audiometric testing, providing tinnitus treatment using Progressive Tinnitus Management, or when we treat a patient using telehealth services. Our collaborative efforts working alongside and sharing information with our peers while learning from VA Audiology researchers allows us to meet the complex needs of our patients.

Our ability to provide high quality, evidence-based care is why it is important for all VA Audiologists to ensure that we protect our patients. Every audiologist is invested in the success and long-term well being of our profession. This is why every audiologist has the duty to serve as an advocate for audiology to ensure we are able provide the best care possible to our patients and to ensure that future generations of audiologists have this ability as well.

We have enjoyed many years of autonomous practice as audiologists, but recently we have encountered legislation that could impact how our clinics provide care to Veterans. In 2017, H.R. 3471, more commonly known as "Fit to Serve" was passed. This legislation allowed for hearing instrument specialists to be hired at VA to provide hearing healthcare services. AVAA, AAA, and ASHA worked together to ensure changes were made to the language of the bill in order to protect our patients and ensure they continue to receive the best care possible.

Recently we emailed all of you regarding Senate Bill 785 and House Resolution 6612 which included language that was a direct threat to the quality of hearing healthcare provided to our Veterans. Due to the efforts of our professional organizations and most importantly receiving contact from audiologists opposing these bills, we were able to have the most dangerous elements of the bill revised to ensure that all professionals providing hearing healthcare work within their properly defined scope of practice.

AVAA and the other professional hearing organizations will continue to work together to protect our patients, our colleagues, and the field of audiology. While AVAA, AAA, and ASHA are representing you and your professional interests, your voice needs to be heard. We all have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of our profession regardless of whether or not it is VA related. I strongly encourage you to remain aware of national and state legislation and contact your elected officials in support of audiology. If we all make our voices heard, we can do our part to protect our profession and most importantly, the Veterans that we serve.

David Jedlicka, President

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On August 5, 2020, Senate Bill S.785 was passed unanimously the U.S. Senate. Initially, this bill along with similar legislation in the House of Representatives (H.R. 6612) included language that put the field of audiology and quality hearing healthcare provided by the VA at risk. The AVAA board immediately began working with the American Academy of Audiology and ASHA in opposition of these bills. Due to the hard work of these organizations and audiologists contacting their elected officials, most of the language in the Senate bill was able to be modified.

AVAA represents all VA audiologists, however we also have a responsibility in protecting and promoting our profession. The modified language of S.785 removed the proposal to use O*NET surveys to define a Hearing Instrument Specialist's scope of practice. The new language will define the services provided by hearing instrument specialists to be consistent with existing, and appropriate, scopes of practice. Ensuring that proper hearing healthcare standards are being met at the federal level will prevent an inappropriate expansion of allowable services at the state level.

We strongly encourage all AVAA members to continue contacting their elected officials regarding audiology related legislation. We all have a responsibility to remain aware of issues and legislation that may impact the field of audiology. One of the easiest ways to do this is to stay up to date is through the American Academy of Audiology Legislative Action Center. This webpage provides information on issues impacting the field of audiology and allows you to directly contact your representatives regarding those specific issues.

<https://www.audiology.org/get-involved/advocacy/legislative-action-center>

While our recent efforts have focused on issues at the federal level, becoming involved with your state organizations is a great way to make a difference for the field of audiology. Many of us entered this field because we have an innate desire to help others. That ideal of being a helper is in each and everyone of us. It's time that we expand that desire to help locally and nationally by advocating for our profession just as we would advocate for a patient in need.

The AVAA board would like to specifically recognize and thank Jodi Baxter and the American Academy of Audiology Government Relations Committee as well as to Vivianne Wersel for providing tremendous support to help protect the quality of care that is provided to Veterans. We would also like to thank AAA and ASHA for being outstanding partners in our joint efforts to protect and promote the field of audiology.

The Association of VA Audiologists Board



ADVOCACY IN AUDIOLOGY

JODI BAXTER, AU.D.

With the urgent pending legislation HR6612 and S785, the time is now to take the initiative to make contact with your Members of Congress. The idea of this is intimidating to most; most of us did not become audiologists with the goal of being involved governmental affairs, but the need is critical. If there is anything I have learned in my last few years of phone calls, emails, and hill visits it is that our members of Congress are people just like us. Not only do they want to meet individuals who live and work in their districts, but they NEED to hear from people to better understand the policies they are discussing, writing, and voting on. We are the experts when it comes to hearing healthcare and only we can bring to the table the real life experiences; often our representatives are unaware of how legislation will affect our patients.

Don't know how to start?

The first step is to reach out to your Member of Congress's office. You can enter your address into:

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members> to find your House and Senate Representatives.

In COVID times, most visits are occurring virtually; meaning you can arrange a virtual visit from the comfort of your own home. You can schedule a meeting by submitting a Scheduling Request on the Member's webpage, sending an email, or making a phone call.

It is common that you may not meet with your Member of Congress directly; often you are scheduled to meet with a "staffer" who specializes in the topic area you wish to discuss. In this scenario it may be someone who specializes in healthcare and/or VA issues. Don't be disappointed by this! Staffers have the ear of the Member of Congress and are often very influential.

Here are some tips to help ensure your meeting goes smoothly:

Prepare. Make sure you are well-versed on the topic you plan to discuss.

Try to make a personal connection. This will be easier than you think. Many times, this person is from your area or at least your state. Do not spend too much time on this but it helps if you can connect on a personal level.

Be concise and stick to 2-3 key points. Use your own language and avoid making it overly complicated.

The staffer has to be able to turn around and communicate your ask to the Member of Congress.

Tell a relevant and meaningful story; do you have a specific patient or situation that illustrates this problem or need? An anecdote about a real scenario will make you and your ask more memorable.

Be explicit about your conclusion. What are you asking them to do? I.E: *"Please oppose this bill because..."*

Follow up with a thank you email.

Plan to keep it short; most of these meetings do not last more than 10-20 minutes.

The most common thing I hear after a first hill visit is that it was much easier than expected. Our patients and our profession need us to advocate for them and there is no better time to start! Please reach out to me if you would like assistance in this process; AVAA, AAA, ADA, and ASHA all have a wealth of resources and people who will be eager to help.

AVAA BOARD UPDATES

- The AVAA Externship Website is up and running. If you'd like to post your externship position, go to the "Externship" link on myavaa.org to do so.
- The 2021 JDVAC Conference is looking for volunteers. If you're interested in volunteering, please contact Christa Johnson at CMMJohns@gmail.com.
- AVAA will be conducting a membership survey later this year. In order to reach as many VA audiologists as possible, please make sure your colleagues are registered to receive our emails by having them sign up with a non-VA email address at myavaa.org
- We want your feedback! If you have any thoughts regarding AVAA or JDVAC, please share them with us at



PETS OF the AVAA



The AVAA Newsletter team is excited to announcing a new segment in our newsletter—the pets of AVAA!

Please meet Djordje (left) and Petey (right)! These fluffy companions belong to Noreen Kapp M.A. , a fellow audiologist at the Pittsburgh VA.



Meet Bethany Wiseman, Au.D.'s kitties Chewbacca (Grey) and

Obi-Wan (Citrus)! Rent may be expensive in San Francisco, but they more than pay their way with cuddles and cuteness. They spend their days gazing at Karl the Fog, chasing balls, and napping. When one of their audiology roommates teleworked, they provided "Meow'rs" of entertainment for veterans during VVC appointments.

We would love photos of your fur babies sent to our AVAA email account :

AssnVAAuds@gmail.com

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Coming Up in Fall 2020 Issue....

- * **Clinical Education with Elaine Mormer and Christine Ulinski**
- * **A Day in the Life: Extern Edition**