



AVAA AMPLIFIER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Association of VA Audiologists

Spring 2024: Mentorship in VA

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: *Michele Gortemaker, Au.D.*
AVAA President



With our network of 1404 Audiologists at 653 facilities across VHA, we have the unique advantage of supporting each other through mentorship. Whether this is through a formal mentoring program, informal mentorship and collaboration with peers or the opportunity to mentor trainees, the opportunities are endless within VHA Audiology. Having started my VHA career as a trainee and continuing my clinical education during my externship year, VHA Audiologists have had a significant impact on my professional development over the past 15 years.

In the infancy of my career, staff and fee basis Audiologists at Nebraska-Western Iowa VAHCS provided mentorship in adopting best clinical practices and developing rapport with patients. As I transitioned into a leadership role, I traveled to VISN supervisor trainings to learn the tasks at hand, but found that creating relationships with others in similar roles was even more valuable. I had the opportunity to participate in the ASPS Leadership Mentoring Program in 2014 and develop a network of trusted colleagues within ASPS as I continued to learn this new role. I cannot begin to tell you how many times, as a new supervisor, I said "There was nothing about graduate school that could have prepared me for this role."

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- [AVAA Announcements.](#)
- [5 Facts About Mentorship](#)
- [VHA CI Mentorship Program](#)
- [Mentorship for leaders](#)
- [Future directions and beyond](#)
- [Pets of AVAA](#)
- [AVAA Soundbites](#)



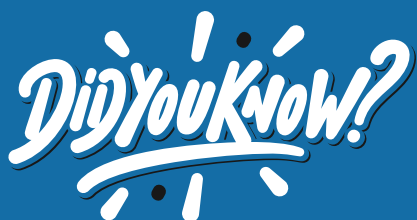
FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: *Continued*

Fortunately, we do not have to work in a silo in VHA and the improvements in technology with instant messaging platforms and virtual meeting platforms have made this even more accessible over the past 10 years. We are a strong network of Audiology leaders, whether in a specialty area of Audiology or in the many leadership roles held in our Healthcare Systems, VISNs or VACO.

In this edition of the AVAA Amplifier, you will learn about some of the more formalized mentorship programs in VHA Audiology including the Cochlear Implant Mentorship Program, the ASPS Leadership Mentoring Program and the proposed CAPD Mentorship Program. There are many other workgroups within VHA Audiology who provide a less formal mentorship opportunity for clinicians who are looking to expand their knowledge and services in the areas such as Virtual Care, Aural Rehabilitation, Tinnitus Management, and Vestibular Care. The AVAA and JDVAC updates in this newsletter demonstrate leadership displayed through volunteers who mentor new board members or committee members and co-chairs from year to year to ensure the continued success of our organization and annual conference.

I will leave you with this quote to consider as you think about how mentorship has played a role in your journey and how you can impact the next generation of VHA Audiologists. You are likely already engaged in mentorship in your day to day interactions with colleagues or trainees.

“Mentorship is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.”
–John Crawford Crosby



AVAA partners with
AudiologyOnline to offer some
excellent CEU opportunities!

Here are our recent and upcoming AVAA & AudiologyOnline presentations:

March 2024: Synchronous Teleaudiology
[Click here](#) for link

June 5, 2024 at 12pm EST:
Teleaudiology in the VA: Emerging Technologies
[Click here](#) for link

Save the Date: **September 4, 2024** and **December 4, 2024** at 12 pm EST





AVAA ANNOUNCEMENTS



JDVAC 2024 = SUCCESS!



JDVAC 2024 is in the books and it was a huge success! From great educational offerings to rockin' social events, this year's planning committee put on an amazing conference! Many thanks to **Dr. Elizabeth Gdula, Lt Col. Dr. Erin Artz, & Dr. Jessica Preston** (shown together in picture below), as well as the JDVAC 2024 planning committee members for their hard work and dedication. We look forward to seeing you all in Atlantic City, NJ at **JDVAC 2025** on April 7-9th.



AVAA ANNOUNCEMENTS - CONTINUED

AVAA AWARDS

AVAA Awards were presented by **Dr. Michele Gortemaker**, AVAA President, at JDVAC 2024.



Dr. Lauren Racoosin,
receiving the Doug
Noffsinger Honors of the
Association Award



Dr. Judy Schafer,
receiving the Frank B.
Walkup IV Distinguished
Service Award



Dr. Ilana Glick,
receiving the
Customer Service
Award



Dr. Kelly Reavis,
winner of the
Research or
Education Award



Dr. Trisha Milnes,
winner of the
Innovation and System
Redesign Award

AVAA ANNOUNCEMENTS - CONTINUED

WELCOME NEW AVAA BOARD MEMBERS!

AVAA elections results are in! Please welcome the following VA audiologists to the AVAA Executive Board beginning in June 2024:



Dr. Melissa Pereira
President-Elect
VA Northern CA
Healthcare System



Dr. Stacey Sturgulewski
Secretary
Edward Hines Jr.
VA Hospital



Dr. Ashley Zambetti
Member-at-Large
VA Pittsburgh
Healthcare System

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

We want to hear from our members! We will soon be sending out our **2024 AVAA Membership Survey!** Please register your **PERSONAL E-MAIL ADDRESS** at myavaa.org so we can send you our 2024 member survey, as well as to receive future updates from AVAA. Check your inboxes for our 2024 Membership Survey in the coming weeks!



SOCIAL MEDIA REFRESH!

AVAA is refreshing our social media pages! If you don't currently follow us, find us on Facebook and Instagram and give us a follow!



5 FACTS ABOUT MENTORING



*The AVAA Amplifier went straight to some mentoring experts for this edition! Here are 5 facts about mentoring from **Dr. Ashley Hughes** and **Dr. Lori Zitelli**.*

Many thanks to Dr. Hughes and Dr. Zitelli for sharing their mentorship knowledge with our membership!

1

Mentors provide advice and guidance while sharing their own personal experiences and facilitating networking opportunities.

2

The most effective mentor-mentee relationships are built upon mutual trust and open communication.

3

Benefits to mentees include higher salaries, increased job satisfaction, decreased turnover, and heightened career aspirations.

4

Benefits to mentors include decreased burnout, expansion of skillset, improved leadership and coaching skills, exposure to new perspectives, enhanced interpersonal skills, and reflection opportunities.

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5 FACTS ABOUT MENTORING - CONTINUED

5

You should consider a discussion of the following items as you enter into a mentoring relationship: how often you will meet and on what platform, what your expectations are, and both long- and short-term goals.

Want to learn more? For more information about the relationships among mentees, mentors, students, and instructors, check out our recent AudiologyOnline Webinar:

"Professional Development in Audiology: From Observation to Mentorship."

<https://www.audiologyonline.com/audiology-ceus/course/professional-development-in-audiology-from-39181#reviews>



Ashley Hughes, Au.D. works for Interacoustics US, and is the main point of contact for all audiometry, impedance, OAE, hearing aid fitting, and telehealth solutions. Prior to joining Interacoustics, Dr. Hughes first worked clinically and then as a research audiologist. She has served as an invited speaker at state and national conferences and is an author on multiple published articles and posters on topics including real-ear measurements, subjective outcome measures, advocacy, mentorship, negotiations, and more. She is highly involved in the American Academy of Audiology along with her state audiology organization, the Minnesota Academy of Audiology.



Lori Zitelli is the Audiology Manager at UPMC and an adjunct instructor at the University of Pittsburgh. Her special interests include amplification, evaluation and treatment of tinnitus/decreased sound tolerance, clinical research, and interventional audiology. She is a Certificate Holder in Tinnitus Management (CH-TM) and was the recipient of the 2022 AAA Early Career Audiologist Award.

WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE: VHA CI MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



Dr. Cyndi Trueheart, chief of Audiology at West Haven VA and VHA CI Advisory Board, shares some info about the VHA Cochlear Implant Mentorship program. Many thanks to Dr. Trueheart for her contribution!

Development of the Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA) Audiology Cochlear Implant Mentorship Program began in early 2022. The idea of a mentorship program was established by retired audiologist, **Dr. Nancy Cambron** and current Cochlear Implant Advisory Board Chairperson, **Dr. Rachel Hopp** with the mission to bring together like-minded individuals with a passion for providing cochlear implant services to Veterans across the nation. When they asked me to be part of this I was honored and beaming with excitement.

There is a lack of audiologists throughout national VHA to provide cochlear implant services to Veterans. Instituting an educational program on cochlear implants broadens the reach and increases the quality and uptake of VHA cochlear implant care. This results in improved functional and quality of life outcomes for thousands of Veterans each year for whom a cochlear implant is an effective treatment option. The Cochlear Implant Mentorship Program is designed to provide live virtual education through presentations and discussions in foundational cochlear implant practices, as well as connect clinicians to experienced VHA cochlear implant audiologists for guidance to increase understanding of VHA cochlear implant processes and procedures ultimately to promote cochlear implants as a viable option for all our hearing-impaired Veterans that need it.

In its second year we continue to revise the program to meet the needs of all audiologists in the VHA healthcare system. The program is for audiologists with a variety of goals. Some mentees want to gain knowledge about cochlear implants to best refer candidates to their nearest VHA cochlear implant center while other participants are focused on becoming cochlear implant audiologists or applying to become a programming center, full cochlear implant center or telehealth site. We welcome all levels whether new to VHA or with vast experience.

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VHA CI MENTORSHIP PROGRAM - CONTINUED

In its initial stages the outcomes are magnificent leading to an increased number of cochlear implant referrals, more Veterans implanted, new cochlear implant audiologists in VHA, and establishment of programming or full cochlear implant centers across the country. Through education and direct access to an experienced cochlear implant audiologist we see greater confidence among audiologists in VHA to discuss cochlear implant options with their patients.

Finally, I want to thank our impressive array of mentors for being willing to share their knowledge, time and guidance to the field. This program could not exist without them. If you are interested in this program, let's connect! Reach out to me at cyndi.trueheart@va.gov for more information on the CI mentorship program.

Considering starting a "CI Journey" at your VA?

Dr. Janelle Stone from VA Finger Lakes Healthcare System
shares her CI Mentorship Program experience

I will always be grateful for my CI mentor and the CI mentorship program. Acceptance into the program meant that I would be lucky enough to have a VA CI tour guide. My CI mentor is someone who was there to walk with me, offer advice, and give suggestions. All participants in the program were accessible to each other and acted as a sounding board during the adventure of learning what I call the VA CI way.



My CI mentor was perfect – She was very welcoming, obviously interested in seeing that I was successful, took interest in my previous CI experience and what I hoped to gain from the program. She gave me the confidence to know that if at any point I did not know the answer to a what, where, or how, I soon would. It became obvious quite quickly that everyone involved in the program is focused on helping audiologists provide the best care to Veterans and it could not have been a more positive experience. As a result of this program, I am now recognized as a CI audiologist within the VA and will soon lead a new Cochlear Implant Programming Center at the Rochester CBOC.

Soon after this piece was submitted to the AVAA Amplifier, VA Finger Lakes Healthcare System was approved as a Cochlear Implant Programming Center!

MENTORSHIP:

Leaders love it too!

“Behind every great leader, at the base of every great tale of success, you will find an indispensable circle of trusted advisors, mentors and colleagues.”

-Unknown

*Did you know that the ASPS program office offers a Leadership Mentoring Program for new Service Chiefs, Line Managers and Section Leaders? Many thanks to **Dr. Lauren Racoosin** from the ASPS program office for sharing information about this program.*

The Audiology and Speech Pathology Leadership Mentoring Program pairs new leaders with experienced colleagues, providing an exceptional opportunity for mentorship and leadership development. The program is intended for those who supervise audiologists and/or speech language pathologists. Requirements include attendance at monthly Teams meetings, regular contact with an assigned mentor, and completion of a program-related project. The program runs March–December.

Topics covered are not Audiology or Speech Pathology content based. Example topics include: employee relations, data management, working with your Executive Leadership Team.

The application process typically opens in January. The field is notified through email as well as the ASPS National Program Office Newsletter, the Midweek Memo.



MENTORSHIP & LEADERS - *Continued*



Dr. Mary Kelly Bone, Section Chief of ASPS at Cincinnati VAMC, shares her experience participating in the ASPS Supervisor Mentoring Program. Many thanks to Dr. Bone for her contribution!

I attended the ASPS Leadership Mentoring Program in 2016 when I was a fairly new supervisor. I had held many roles in the VA prior to becoming a supervisor. I started as a trainee, moved through my externship year, worked as an audiologist at 2 VA facilities prior to becoming the lead audiologist and last a supervisor over audiology. This was over my 16 year career at that time. During all that history, I learned a lot about Audiology and quite a bit about the VA. However, supervision was new.

At that time, ten new supervisors were chosen to be mentored from across the nation. New supervisors had been in their positions for less than 3 years. The mentors had been in leadership positions for 5 years or greater. I was lucky to be assigned a mentor that I already had a good working relationship with, as **Dr. Maureen Wargo** had been my externship supervisor years before.

By the second meeting, I had already learned things about the way the VA is organized that no one ever explained. **Dr. Rachel McArdle** at that time did a fantastic talk about the difference between the program office (the policy makers) versus the operations side of the house (the patient care providers). I had always thought that ASPS National Office was in the direct line of patient care support, though it is not.

Dr. McArdle presented many topics through out the process including data (DSS) and cost accounting. She was joined by a multitude of others that presented on topics ranging from soft skills to performance evaluations and management issues. After every session, my mentor and I would have a discussion about the topic and how it related to my current work situations.

In addition to didactic learning, each mentee-mentor pair worked together on a leadership project. This allowed each mentee to develop skills for talking with leadership, presenting data-driven information, and process improvement. Each mentee presented at the end of the course and aided each other to further refine their projects where needed.

Even if you have been in the VA for years (like me) or you are completely new to the VA and VA leadership, this program has something to offer you. It allowed me to continue to grow my skills providing the necessary skills to take on the Section Chief role when it became available.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS & BEYOND:



Mentorship experiences can be professionally fulfilling, as well as personally rewarding. New mentorship opportunities are developing every day! Here is some info about a future mentorship opportunity, as well as some mentorship resources/organizations that go beyond our world of VA audiology!



CAPD

The DOD/VA/NCRAR Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD) working group has advocated for a mentor/mentee program to help busy audiologists facilitate their own CAPD program with additional support from those audiologists already running a similar clinic. This allows APD testing for our Service Members and Veterans who have “within normal limits”/hidden hearing loss results in their hearing evaluations, but are still reporting communication issues, TBI, PTSD, blast exposure, hazardous chemical exposure, etc.

We have started a mentor group and plan for this program to be launched this Fall 2024. Further information will be published through the National Audiologist email group as it becomes pertinent to share. Feel free to contact **Dr. Anna Weasenforth** for current questions/concerns.



Look beyond the VA Audiology clinic for mentor resources. Here are some suggestions!



AAA



ASHA



SAA



ADA



**Healthcare
Professionals
Organizations**



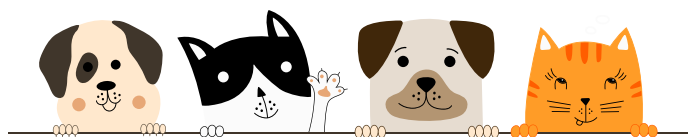
**State
Audiology
Academies**

Pets of AVAA



Edith (left) and Wilbur (right) belong to **Dr. Rachel Hopp** from the Phoenix VA. Edie is a 12 year old Great Dane, who has as much energy as her as her pup sibling, Wilbur (a 3-year-old setter mix). Her most incredible characteristic is her AGE! The average lifespan of a Dane is about 8 years, so perhaps the Phoenix sunshine is helping her live longer? Wilbur's most interesting characteristic is that, much like his Charlotte's Web inspired name, when excited he squeals like a piglet! Edie likes food, top-down Jeep rides, Wilbur and any human--but isn't a fan of garbage trucks or Veterinary visits. Wilbur loves his sister Edie, tennis balls, intense staring and getting his ears brushed. He dislikes white vehicles or strangers.

Daisy was adopted from the Hinsdale Illinois Humane Society on November 12, 2017, which is now her "birthday". Her family thinks she is about 9 years old. She is very social kitty and loves people (both adults and kids!). She never misses a movie night or a good head scratch! Daisy belongs to **Dr. Kelly Beeman** from the Hines VA Hospital.





AVAA Soundbites



We are here to sweeten up your spring! AVAA Soundbites proud to present a delicious recipe from **Dr. Erica Dombrowsky** from the Miami VA.

Coconut Cupcakes with lime frosting

For Cupcakes:

Cooking spray
4.5 oz all-purpose flour (about 1 cup)
3 T potato starch
1 t baking power
1/2 t salt
3/4 c sugar
2 T butter, softened
1 large egg
1 large egg white
2 T flaked sweetened coconut
1/2 t vanilla extract

For Frosting:

3 T butter, softened
1 t half-and-half
1/2 t grated lime rind
1 T fresh lime juice
4.75 oz powdered sugar, sifted (about 1 1/3 cups)



To prepare cupcakes:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place 2 muffin cup liners in each of 12 muffin cups; coat liners with cooking spray. Weigh or lightly spoon flour into a dry measuring cup; level with a knife. Combine flour and next 3 ingredients (through salt in a small bowl; stir with a whisk. Combine 3/4 cup sugar and 2 tablespoons butter in a large bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until blended (mixture will be the consistency of damp sand). Add egg white, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add flour mixture and milk alternately to egg mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Fold in coconut and vanilla. Spoon batter evenly into prepared muffin cups. Bake at 350 degrees for 18 minutes or until cupcakes spring back when touched lightly in the center. Cool in pan 2 minutes; remove from pan. Cool completely on wire rack.

To prepare frosting:

Combine 3 tablespoons butter and next 3 ingredients (through juice) in a medium bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until smooth. Gradually add the powdered sugar, beating just until smooth. Spread about 2 1/2 teaspoons frosting onto each cupcake.



In the next AVAA Amplifier:
Innovations in Audiology