

Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey

HLA-NJ News and Views

A Monthly Column from The Hearing Loss Association of N.J.

By Peter Yerkes, Trustee, HLA-NJ

Behind the Scenes at a Hospital —

Tips on Hospital Stays for People with Hearing Loss

It's 3 AM in a North Jersey hospital, I'm recovering from major hip surgery and I desperately need pain medication. The nursing aide who can help is in my room. My hearing, however, is so bad I have no idea what she is saying. Is she going to bring the medication? Are they out of it? Does she have to check with my doctor? I explain my hearing problems, and ask her to repeat what she said more slowly. She stares at me with distaste, turns and walks out of the room without saying a word.

People with hearing loss have good reason to dread hospitals. Staff members are seldom trained to help people who are hard of hearing, and their reaction is likely to range from bafflement to anger. Here's what I encountered in a recent hospital stay, and a report on how I coped and how I could have done better.

How I handled the pain med issue; I waited half an hour or so, and tried again. After a few more tries I got a different aide who brought the medication. What I wish I had done; made arrangements when I checked in to the hospital to have my needs written out on my patient chart and a sign over my bed. After the incident I describe, I should have followed up immediately with a supervisor or my doctor to make sure it didn't happen again.

A visit from a specialist; after dinner one night, a doctor I had never seen before walked in. With a thick central European accent, she began a rapid-fire explanation ofsomething. When I asked her to write me a brief explanation, she filled two pages with names of bacteria and viruses that meant nothing to me. What I did; waited until I saw my doctor again several days later to discuss the issue. What I wish I had done; asked for a nurse or aide I could understand to repeat what this doctor was saying – and contact my doctor as well.

The operating room; I'm flat on my back, surrounded by doctors and nurses I can't understand because they are all wearing surgical masks and I can't lip read. What I did; explained that if there was something I needed to understand, someone would have to move their mask, face me and talk slowly. That worked. What I wish I had done; asked in advance for someone designated to assist me in the operating room and recovery room.

My most important lesson; don't be intimidated by busy doctors and nurses. Patients have a right to understand exactly what is being said. Insist on it. When checking in, ask to speak to the designated patient advocate for hard of hearing patients and work out the communication arrangements you will need during your hospital stay. Make sure to file a complaint if your needs are not addressed. This helps all of us, as future hospital patients.

SAVE THE DATES

June 16-19, 2011. Hearing Loss Association of America Convention 2011, Washington DC. Learn more at www.hearingloss.org.

October 15, 2011. Garden State-NJ Walk4Hearing. Mercer County Park West, West Windsor NJ. Information at www.walk4hearing.org.

GET INVOLVED. The Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey has three chapters, serving Bergen, Middlesex and Ocean/Monmouth counties.

Information is available from info@hearingloss-nj.org , or at our website, www.hearingloss-nj.org. To receive informative updates, ask to be put on our e-mail contact list.

HLA-NJ Chapter Meeting

Sunday, May 1, 2011 is our next meeting
In the "Center for Healthy Living"
198 Prospect St., Lakewood, NJ 08701

The topic for this month meeting will be "May is Better Hearing Month" Veterans and Hearing Loss. The War Veteran sharing experiences in getting hearing help and adjusting to war-related hearing loss. Meetings are open to everyone and are a rewarding way to spend a few hours socializing with other hard of hearing individuals who share your problems and concerns. As always, light refreshments will be served. Feel free to bring your favorite dessert to share. The following dates are on our monthly schedule.

(All dates and speakers are tentative and subject to change.)

Future 2011 Meetings:

June 5, July 10, August 7,
September 11, October 2,
November 6, December 4.

For any additional information, contact: oceanmonmouthhla@yahoo.com