



Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Virginia

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Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Virginia Position Statement on Consumer-Administered Hearing Tests and Direct-to- Consumer Hearing Aide Sales

In January 2012, hi HealthInnovations, a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, began offering hearing aids over the Internet with no out-of-pocket costs to certain United Healthcare Medicare Advantage members, as well as direct-to-consumer hearing aids for people outside its network. hi HealthInnovations is informing those policy holders that they may take an “online, scientifically validated hearing test,” submit this audiogram online, and they will receive a custom made hearing aid. This is the insurance company’s attempt to reduce or contain costs.

While we appreciate that an on-line hearing screening may increase consumer awareness of hearing loss, the Speech-Language-Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV) is committed to informing the public about hearing health, hearing testing and hearing aids. We agree that curtailing healthcare costs is an important issue. However, hearing health, hearing testing and hearing amplification is a medical concern that should be assessed by professionals that are educated and trained to evaluate hearing ability, interpret hearing tests results, fit patients with an appropriate hearing aid, and provide appropriate counseling. These professionals need to be licensed with the state of Virginia. It is crucial that patients have access to these professionals, which may be with an audiologist, hearing aid specialist, or otolaryngologist. A medical evaluation by a licensed physician is also recommended for children and adults prior to a hearing aid purchase.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates hearing aids, which are medical devices (Type I) intended to compensate for hearing loss. “Hearing aids should be properly fitted by a licensed hearing healthcare professional (such as an audiologist or a hearing aid dispenser) so that the amplification matches your hearing loss. If not fitted properly, too much amplification may cause additional hearing loss.” SHAV is concerned that patient safety might be compromised with the on-line approach.

<http://www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/ProductsandMedicalProcedures/HomeHealthandConsumer/ConsumerProducts/HearingAids/ucm181477.htm>

The Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), American Academy of Audiology (AAA), American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and International Hearing Society (IHS) have put out a joint position statement and ASHA has public information entitled, **“What You Should Know Before Buying Hearing Aids Online.”**

<http://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Joint-Statement-Consumer-Administered-Hearing-Tests.pdf#search=%22joint%22>

<http://www.asha.org/public/hearing/Buying-Hearing-Aids-Online/>

Our organization has concerns about hearing tests and sale of hearing aids to consumers online without the involvement of a physician and a licensed hearing health professional – an audiologist, hearing aid specialist, or otolaryngologist. We are concerned about patient safety in self-fitting, specifically safety regulations related to sound output levels, regarding their hearing health and wish to educate consumers regarding purchasing hearing aids and related devices.

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