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Telehealth & Tinnitus: A Sound Connection

Ben Thompson, AuD

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Dr. Ben Thompson is an audiologist and tinnitus expert. He completed his residency at University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) and is a past board member of the California Academy of Audiology. Dr. Thompson founded Treble Health in 2020.

Treble Health provides industry-leading telehealth services for hearing aids and tinnitus treatment. Treble's team of expert Audiologists help you choose hearing aids that are the best match, so you can hear to the best of your potential. The company's mission is to help you hear well, stay healthy longer, and live a full life with family and friends.

Dr. Thompson hosts a popular YouTube channel that focuses on tinnitus management and hearing health. His videos have gained millions of views. The channel provides independent reviews of hearing aid technology. Dr. Thompson makes YouTube review videos of tinnitus products, OTC hearing aids, and traditional hearing aids. Visit the Treble Health YouTube channel to learn more about today's newest technology for tinnitus and hearing loss.



Disclosures

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Financial: Ben Thompson is the CEO of Treble Health. He received an honorarium for presenting this course. Non-financial: Ben Thompson has no relevant non-financial relationships to disclose.
 - **Content Disclosure:** This learning event does not focus exclusively on any specific product or service.
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Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Explain the steps needed to launch a telehealth service in their clinic.
- Discuss how to decide which kind of services they will offer to their patients.
- Describe how to select a pricing structure to use in their clinic.

What is Telehealth?

- Performing healthcare services remotely through technology
- May include video consultations, health monitoring, and online health education.
- Became increasingly popular due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benefits of Telehealth

- Increased access to patients who can't or don't want to travel to appointments.
- Increased efficiency to save time and reduce administrative costs.
- Convenient and safe alternative to in-person medical appointments.

Telehealth for Tinnitus

- Which professionals can work with tinnitus patients via telehealth?
 - Audiologist
 - ENT Physician
 - Psychologist
 - And more..

Basic Terms

- Synchronous
 - Real-time
 - Video calls
 - Live hearing aid adjustments
- Asynchronous
 - Store-and-forward
 - Email
 - “Click to update settings” style hearing aid adjustments

Hardware Needed

- In Your Clinic
 - Web camera
 - Microphones
 - Computer monitors
- For Your Patients
 - Web camera or mobile phone
 - Microphones
 - Computer/Smartphone

Software Needed

- In Your Clinic (Must be HIPAA compliant)
 - Zoom
 - Gmail
 - Scheduling Tools
- For Your Patients
 - Smartphone
 - Zoom

What About Otoscopy?

- Required at the time of the hearing test
- Telehealth appointments cannot look into the ear for otoscopy
- When there is a need for otoscopy, the patient must go to a local audiologist or physician

Remote Hearing Aid Programming

- What You Need
 - Internet connection
 - Hearing aid programming software
 - Video conferencing software
- What You DON'T Need
 - Otoscopy
 - Real ear machine
 - VNG equipment

Benefits for Audiologists

- Specialty care
- Concierge service
- Accessibility
- Continuity of care
- Reach more patients
- Involve family members
- Prevent unnecessary trips to the clinic

Risks for Audiologists

- Interruptions in connectivity (technology)
- Unauthorized access by third parties
- Some problems can only be solved with an in-person appointment

Clinical Training

- CBT is usually performed by psychologists
- Internet-based CBT care can be supported by audiologists and has shown success with patient outcomes (1)
- Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) can be effectively performed by audiologists (2)

1 - Henry et al. (2022)

2 - Han et al. (2021)

How To Measure Improvement

- Tinnitus Functional Index (TFI)
 - Baseline
 - 3 months
 - 6 months
 - 12 months

Next Steps to Launch

- Basic configuration of video conferencing tools
- Create appointment types for telehealth
- Train staff on how to use video conferencing tools and communicate with patients
- Determine cost of services

What I've Learned

- Story of how I started, how our model changed, and where we see this going in the future.
- Our journey of creating services and offerings, adjusting prices, what we learned that patients and providers respond to, unbundled v bundled, subscription v flat-fee, option to add on services.



What I've Learned

- What were things that we tried but they didn't work?
- What did I learn from that failure?

What I've Learned

- Reimbursement, marketing, branding, staffing, length of appointments
- How are the services and devices bundled together?
- Sales, profitability
- Can they bill for it? Or private pay?

Telehealth Services

- Separate business entity
 - Consider a separate LLC from your hearing aid practice so that you can bill private pay for tinnitus
- Licensure in multiple states / telehealth
 - Generally, you must be licensed in the state that the patient resides. Check your state's regulations.
- What can be billed?
 - Counseling a patient
 - Adjusting hearing aids

Telehealth Services

- Services You Can Perform via Telehealth
 - Counseling
 - Remote hearing aid fitting
 - Health coaching
 - Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT)

Telehealth Devices

- Remote fitting of devices
- Offering a low-cost tinnitus masking solution with an option to add on services
- Having one or two options that can be offered
- Convey the strong recommendation that it's really needed

Improving Clinical Skills

- What are the things that you need to do to improve clinical skills?
- Are you confident in your ability to help someone with tinnitus?

First Steps For Tinnitus Care

- Start with sound therapy, CBT principles, and stress reduction

Things To Consider

- Don't come off as "they were just trying to sell me hearing aids"

Educating Tinnitus Patients

- How should you set the devices on their ears
- Consider a sound therapy protocol to follow
- Provide some resources for options to continue education

Referrals

- Establish referrals for more difficult cases
- Dentist who works with TMJ and jaw issues
- Doctor of Osteopathy who works with neck issues
- Psychologist
- Psychiatrist

Thank You!

Ben Thompson, AuD

References

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