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Prioritizing End-User Empowerment and Why That Matters

Presenter: Taylor DeVito, AuD

Hello and welcome. Thank you so much for choosing this course. Widex is grateful to have the opportunity to present to you today via audiology online. We recognize your time is valuable and we appreciate any time you dedicate to learning more about our hearing health solutions. Today's presentation is going to focus on prioritizing end user empowerment and why that matters.

A bit. About your speaker today I'm Doctor Taylor DeVito. I'm an audiologist by training and I'm a clinical education specialist for the west team at Widex USA. For our speaker disclosures for this course, I am an employee at Widex USA and I do receive financial compensation. There are no other non financial relationships to report and for our learner objectives after this course, participants will be able to describe the benefit of empowering end users.

Participants will be able to list three types of tools used to maximize end user empowerment, and participants will be able to describe two features within the Widex app designed to help wearers help themselves before we get started, I want you to take a second to think about what empowerment means to you, particularly as it relates to our patients.

Maybe some words like confidence, independence, participation, control, engagement might come to mind, and I think it's important to call out control because this can sometimes have a negative connotation to some, but we'll discuss in a few minutes why some control is actually a good thing.

According to the National Institute of Health, the World Health Organization defines patient empowerment as a process through which people gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health and should be seen as both an individual and community process, meaning it is not just up to the patient, but also us as healthcare providers to encourage and support patients to become more empowered and to take more of an active role in their health, in particular their hearing health, as it relates to us.

What are the consequences for the hearing care professional and the wearer if a patient does not feel empowered? If they do not have that confidence, that independence, and that participation in their hearing care journey, what does this mean for hearing care professionals? An unempowered patient can mean losing time. If you have a patient that doesn't take any ownership of their devices or actively participate in their rehabilitation, they can be much more reliant on you for things that you probably wish they could be more independent with, for example, making manual adjustments in the moment to help themselves hear better in tricky situations in real time, rather than showing up at your office the next day complaining about something that already happened or is very challenging to address after the fact. This is where a healthy amount of wearer control is a good thing.

It can lead to frustration with a patient due to their unwillingness to commit to their treatment. And as one can imagine, if someone is not invested or involved in their treatment or rehabilitation, that could increase the likelihood that they would not choose to move forward with the solution that you've provided.

And what does that mean for the wearer?

If they're not fully invested in the solution and the process, and are feeling these negative feelings, they may return them, or even worse, just not wear the hearing aids, wasting time and money on something that they do not perceive benefit from.

If they aren't feeling empowered, that can cause them to lose motivation to invest the time needed to become a successful hearing aid user. Because we all know it takes commitment, especially in the beginning. And if they don't feel successful with it, they will lose confidence in the product again, potentially leading to a return or just not wearing them.

And we all know the risks of not treating the hearing loss and the associations with several negative societal and health conditions like social isolation, depression and dementia.

So what can we do about this? How can we ensure that when patients leave your office, they leave happy, ready to engage and really get the most of their hearing aids and thrive throughout their hearing loss journey? You might recall we hosted a national webinar with Sheri Eberts and Gail Hannon, two women with hearing loss that have become excellent advocates for others with hearing loss. They shared some extremely helpful tips and tricks on empowering patients to not only hear better, but communicate better and live skillfully with their hearing loss. If you were not able to join our national webinar, you can scan the QR code here to learn more.

Their discussion focused more on the non technological aspects of patient empowerment. This course will focus more on the technology, specifically the tools that we have available that can truly maximize a patient's experience with their hearing devices. Because, as you may know, the hearing aid is not always the silver bullet. While it's often the main focus, there are other levers to pull that can honestly and significantly enhance the success of a patient's hearing loss journey. That is one thing that Sheri and Gail emphasized.

Having a hearing loss is truly a lifelong journey, and they rely on our expertise and recommendations to support and empower them along the way through the peaks and valleys of that journey, let's take a look at the tools we have at our disposal that we can offer patients, tools that can have a significant influence on a patient's perception of success with their hearing devices. Today, we will focus on three AI apps and accessories, not only the products themselves, but also some new research validating how effective these tools can be at enhancing the listening experience for your patients, making them that much more satisfied with your products and services, and truly empowering them to live their best life with hearing loss.

Before we delve into specific products, let's look at some numbers that put some context around this conversation. I think sometimes there's a bit of a misconception that as hearing aid technology improves, there should be less and less need for ancillary devices such as apps and accessories. But what we actually see happening is the opposite. PKU et al analyzed several years of market track data, specifically looking at benefit and satisfaction results as they related to certain features. In case you are not familiar with Marketrak, it is a survey conducted every three to four years by the Hearing Industries association.

It focuses on trends in hearing aid use, satisfaction and adoption in the US, providing both us as hearing aid manufacturers and you as hearing care providers providers extremely valuable information about end user wants and needs regarding their hearing solutions. Marketrack obviously looks at all sorts of different topics for our purposes. Today, we're going to focus on this bottom portion related to accessories and apps. It's no real surprise that the app numbers have increased so significantly by 38%, as the availability and usage of smartphones has also increased significantly since 2015. But even in 2019, app awareness was only 17%, up to 44% in 2022 and likely even higher in 2024.

And maybe more surprisingly to some, is the almost 20% increase in accessories such as remote controls, streamers and remote mics. Even with improving hearing aid technology, what's cool to see is that patients utilizing these tools have an overall better experience with their hearing aids expressing higher satisfaction than those without. That is significant if we know we have access to tools that improve the patient experience, and we know that those tools support patient success and empowerment, let's utilize them. And this is no small number of patients look at the end here. Over 800 wearers were surveyed.

The first topic we'll focus on is artificial intelligence, or AI. There are many different types of AI found in hearing aids today, and where Widex has chosen to focus our innovations in AI is with optimizing

hearing in real time, giving the patient a real world empowerment tool right in the palm of their hand.

There is an important distinction in the type of AI we're talking about. As I mentioned previously, there are many different types of AI found in hearing aids, as AI is sort of an umbrella term used to discuss technology trained to mimic the human mind. But just because it is trained does not always mean it continues to learn. That is where real time machine learning comes into play. Not only is it trained to mimic the human mind, it is continuously learning from human input and improving its efficacy over time.

Both types of AI are found in Widex technology. We've got the pre trained AI that maximizes the automatic programs of the hearing aid, analyzing the environment the person is in, and then making adjustments to optimize the wearer's hearing in any given situation. We call that our sound class technology. The sound classes are fantastic, not only from an automatic adjustment point of view for the wearer, but also from a fine tuning point of view from the hearing care professional. And then we've got our real time machine learning that is utilized via the moment app, and that is where we're going to focus first.

How many times have you had a patient come in, possibly bag in hand, which is the worst, complaining about a specific situation in which they were not able to hear the way they wanted. What are your options at that point? Try to counsel them off the I want to return these things ledge and or make some fine tuning adjustments that are an educated guess at best and a total shot in the dark at worst based on the accuracy of the patient's report. This can lead to frustration, annoyance, money back and forth visits with your patients, and a loss of professional time. And we can address this burden that is on the end user and us with tools that will help today.

Back to that topic of control. Many times we hear hearing care professionals reluctant to give patients control of their hearing aids. And why is that? Maybe we don't trust them to make the right adjustments.

Or maybe deep down we fear that we won't be needed anymore.

Let me reassure you with our real time machine learning, we have found the perfect balance of the wearer being able to help themselves hear better in the moment without letting them undo your hard work and reprogram their own hearing aids, keeping you very much a part of the equation, as you very much should be, and helping avoid some of those negative situations shown here.

The story of our real time machine learning started in 2018 with Widex Evoke. To bridge this gap between the auditory scenario, the auditory intention, and the hearing aid controls, SoundSense learn was created. SoundSense learn connects the power of machine learning through the smartphone. It can quickly adapt advanced hearing aid settings to adjust hearing parameters in real time, all driven by end user preferences and intentions. An industry game changer at its launch, SoundSense Learn laid the groundwork for new generations of AI to come enter Mysound 2.0.

It is a leap forward, moving that customized solution from minutes to seconds. It will keep learning from real world input, and it will continue to evolve into an even more effective and efficient sound customizing solution. And it offers the right amount of control for every patient, allowing them to help themselves in the moment and then reset when they leave that situation, or allowing them to create a favorites program that they can return to in the future if needed.

SoundSense Learn has helped users adjust their hearing aid settings in problematic situations hundreds of thousands of times. Each dot represents a program a user has created. Adjustments made with SoundSense learn are very diverse and completely individual, fulfilling a need that could not be met with automatics alone. However, the lack of any clusters discernible to the naked eye indicates that more advanced analysis was needed. Building new algorithms, Widex was able to analyze every a b comparison made by users in listening situations, such as work quiet in restaurants, and so on.

We used advanced probability calculations to predict the likelihood of preference produced 10,000 ideal programs or settings that represented the preferences indicated for all users and clustered them, allowing for more cleaner understanding of the patterns.

The new algorithms learned from all of this real life data that for listener situations, there are certain settings that were most likely to be chosen by large proportions of users, or 75% for those wearers. Mysound 2.0 will be their go to customization solution.

Let's walk through together how our real time AI solution helps be there in the moment with your patient in any situation they find themselves in, finally able to address each person's listening intent. After answering two simple questions, our AI engine starts to work, making recommendations based on real world preferences of others who engage with SoundSense learn previously. So now, when automation doesn't get it quite right, the user can use my sound to find two ways to solve their problem. The patient is presented with two recommendations with the ability to easily toggle back and forth, reaching their optimized sound in seconds.

And if they don't fall into that 75% of wearers that prefer either of those AI generated recommendations, they still have the option to go in and create their own customized sound using SoundSense learn Widex. Mysound 2.0 even won the hearing Technology Innovator award, recognizing the impact it can have on the user experience and enhancing patient empowerment.

Although the AI we discussed today is accessed via the moment app, we didn't get to delve into the app itself. I want to take some time to focus on some of the other wonderful benefits the app can bring your patient as it relates to self empowerment.

Even if they don't want to utilize our groundbreaking AI technology, there are plenty of easy yet effective adjustment options for them to utilize.

The Widex moment app exceeds expectations, providing patients with dedicated streaming programs that are convenient, versatile and functional.

Unlike most hearing aid apps on the market that are designed for experienced hearing aid users, MyGuide serves as a helping hand in the critical adoption period for first time hearing aid users who need hearing aids to become a natural part of their daily life. My guide will help increase the hearing aid users ability to overcome problems by themselves and thus get more motivated to use their hearing aids and at the same time reducing the need for time consuming service calls or visits to the clinic. It can be a very valuable tool for those newer hearing aid patients that need some additional support in the beginning the Orca lab has conducted a first of its kind study. It's the first in a series exploring patient empowerment in relation to hearing healthcare. It was done through semi structured interview using open ended questions, followed by individual adapted probing questions in order to allow the participants to elaborate and clarify their experience.

Responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, summarizing important themes and arranging them in meaningful ways.

One of the recurring themes of these interviews was that throughout the entire process, prefitting fitting and post fitting was a lack of knowledge. Although generally happy with their level of knowledge about hearing and hearing aids overall, participants could not name one particularly important piece of information that their audiologist had given them about their hearing, hearing aids, nor their hearing health. Participants mentioned their reasoning for actively searching out information. Included they preferred to look out for information themselves. They felt that they had been given unclear answers to their questions or because they had not received information about certain topics.

We experience this every day in the clinic. Patients come back asking questions that you know you covered during the fitting appointment. It is impossible to retain all the information that is relayed in a hearing aid fitting. Wouldn't it be so convenient to be able to give a patient an interactive resource that they can access at any time with just the tap of a finger? That's my guide.

In the moment app this study is available for download in the course materials if you'd like to dig deeper into the results.

Last, but certainly not least, regarding the moment app hearing aid firmware updates let's say we want to introduce a cool new feature or improve bluetooth connectivity. We can deliver those benefits directly to the patient without them having to come into the office just for a firmware update. You don't need to bring them in, hook them up, wait 20 minutes, et cetera. They instantaneously receive the benefit, making their lives better and your life easier.

I know we focused a lot on the moment app, as that is where our wonderful AI features live. But even if your Widex patient does not have a 2.4 GHz enabled hearing aid such as the RiC ten or a custom device, they can still benefit from app based adjustments utilizing the tone link app. Easy, effective adjustments again just right in the palm of their hand.

To confirm which of our apps are compatible with your patient's cell phone, simply scan the QR code. Scanning the code automatically performs a check to see which Widex apps are compatible with their smartphone and provides additional compatibility information as well. You can find the QR code at the URL above or request an in office display from your rep.

Of course, if your patients need additional support or assistance with connectivity, app accessory or charger related questions, please have them reach out. We are more than happy to take some of those time consuming questions or troubleshooting sessions off your hands.

And for additional support for those visual learners, we've got a host of guides available for download in the course materials.

Lastly, we're going to touch on the Widex accessories that are available, focusing on one of our more recent additions and some new evidence surrounding its efficacy.

Here's something to think about. Since you bought your smartphone, have you bought any other things to go alongside that device? How many accessories do you have? Have you bought AirPods, AirPods Pros, or other headphones for listening to music while working out or on teams calls or Zoom calls? Or maybe a Bluetooth speaker to play music from your phone?

If so, you have already surpassed the average assistive product number that is shown here, and that might even be with normal hearing. One assistive device is often not going to be enough for those with hearing loss, and that's okay, and it will be considered the norm. Why should we hold back or gatekeep the options available until it gets too bad or unbearable?

Hearing accessories have come down in costs significantly, are cosmetically appealing, and great on battery life using the convenience of rechargeability. Let's bring those options to the table early in the process so that patients understand that if hearing aids alone do not address all of their concerns, there are many other options available that can help more than you aren't fighting an uphill battle. If you feel you need to recommend something additional further down the road, the HHIA is a great tool to help you formalize determining how a person's hearing condition affects their life. I suggest using something like this for each patient. This helps quantify and support with individual examples of why you are recommending what's in the plan.

You'll also revisit the form to re instruct or re educate on any additional work that needs to be addressed. Good communication can be great communication using the education you provide and the tools to support these goals.

With the extensive Widex accessory portfolio, we've got something for everyone, from a simple remote control to the only landline streaming solution on the market, to tv streamers and more. Unfortunately, we won't have time to cover all of these options in depth today, so please reach out if you're interested in learning more about our accessories today, we're going to focus on our two newest accessories, along with some recent and very compelling efficacy evidence.

First, I'd like to introduce you to the newest member of the Widex accessory ecosystem, the SoundConnect. SoundConnect is a discreet and easy to use USB device that plugs into any PC. It provides simple plug and play streaming of audio from a personal computer directly to Smartika or other 2.4 GHz moment platform styles. SoundConnect works great for Microsoft Teams Zoom, Google, Meet, and other music and media players like YouTube and Spotify.

The push button puts the sound connect into pairing mode when pairing to the hearing aids. The LED light indicates when sound Connect is in pairing mode connected, actively streaming or in service mode.

This is an optional example of the many ways we allow the patient to customize the streaming options using SoundConnect. People with hearing loss need a lot of s and r, and yet many of the things we do work against us, such as fitting open, which naturally reduces the benefit of directional microphones. In fact, in the real world, we aren't getting nearly the promised directionality benefits that are often published. But we don't always have the option to occlude a patient so that they can benefit more from the hearing aid processing. And even if we do, sometimes it still isn't enough for the patients that are really struggling to understand a noise.

Sometimes patients just need more than a hearing aid can provide. So then what?

Enter the Widex sound assist, a device that can help a patient out in just about any situation.

If you don't know much about the Widex sound assist or what it does, it is a six in one device. It serves as a remote mic with both table and partner. Mic modes can be used as a hands free streamer with mics, a telecoil streamer and a remote control. The possibilities are endless with this multipurpose accessory.

Although sound assist has been around for a little while and we've seen how much people love it, we wanted to test just how much benefit it was providing in a couple of different real life use case scenarios. Studies which evaluate a remote mics efficacy should include a consideration of distance in its design in order to have a more complete picture of its efficacy. More specifically, a design that includes varying talker listener or TL distances could shed light on how much difficulty listeners are having in various TL separations and how much benefit the remote mic offers in these different tl separations. Knowing that can help clinicians counsel and instruct on using remote mics more effectively. So that's really what we were looking at here.

How effective is the Widex sound assist in different talker listener situations?

First, looking at the partner mic mode and how far away the sound assist is from the speaker's mouth, we tested it at three, six, and nine inches away from the speaker, from right up under the chin to the maximum length of the lanyard that comes with the device. And what we found was huge. At three inches, the wearer gets up to 20 decibels and r improvement, and even at the furthest .9 inches they still get eleven decibels and our improvement.

And this is a big deal. There is no hearing aid alone that can give this much help to our patients. Now, looking at the table mic mode again at varying distances, we looked at one, two, and 4ft from the remote mic to the person speaking. Obviously, the smaller the talker listener difference, the better. If you can get the remote mic within 1ft of the talker, the listener will receive 14 dbs in our improvement.

And we know that's not always possible. So we looked at some more realistic scenarios of 2ft and even 4ft. At the typical table mic distance of 2ft, we are still measuring an eleven decibels in our improvement.

Again, that's so significant. That is such a huge help for those patients who are struggling to hear in noisy environments.

Just to reiterate, the current study showed up to 20 decibels and r improvement when utilizing a remote mic like the Widex sound assist. Depending on that talker level difference, we should be recommending this to anyone that is struggling to communicate in noise. It will be a game changer for them. We've got the full article reviewing the study mentioned, as well as a 30 minutes course live on audiologyonline.com if you'd like to learn more. If you scan the QR code, you can email that link to yourself to read it later if you'd like.

So what do you do with all this knowledge now? How can you put it into practice in the real world? Here are a few easy steps to get you started.

If you're not already utilize existing intake forms or create your own. You want to capture as much information and relevant information as possible so that you can shape your conversation and your recommendations around that. This might go without saying, but please do not assume that someone wouldn't want to hear about or wouldn't be able to utilize the additional tools available today. Most are very user friendly, cost effective, and can make a significant difference on patient outcomes. Make

those recommendations, or at least mention the possibility early in the process so that when you do eventually make the recommendation, it does not come as a shock, surprise, or disappointment to the patient.

We have a selection guide as well as an accessory brochure that makes those conversations easy for you to have. We have all these wonderful tools at our disposal today, so let's use them.

All the tools mentioned today will be available for download in the course materials. For more information, reach out to your local Widex rep. Thank you so much for listening to this presentation.