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How to Elevate Aural Rehabilitation Education through Community-Engaged Learning

Shari Eberts, MBA

Kathy Cienkowski, PhD



Shari Eberts, BS, MBA

Shari Eberts is a passionate hearing health advocate, author, and speaker on hearing loss issues. She is the founder of LivingWithHearingLoss.com, a popular blog and online community for people with hearing loss, and an executive producer of We Hear You, an award-winning documentary about the hearing loss experience. Shari has an adult-onset genetic hearing loss and hopes that by sharing her story, she will help others to live more peacefully with their own hearing issues. Her book “Hear & Beyond: Live Skillfully with Hearing Loss” (co-authored with Gael Hannan) is the ultimate survival guide for living with hearing loss. Shari holds a BS in Psychology from Duke University and an MBA from Harvard Business School.



Kathy Cienkowski

Dr. Cienkowski is an associate professor of and program director of Audiology in SLHS. She is also the UCONN LEND Audiology Discipline Coordinator. She studies comprehensive aural rehabilitation (AR) for individuals with acquired hearing loss with an emphasis on care across the lifespan. She is currently investigating factors underlying successful hearing device use, including the impact of health literacy and patient-centered care.

Disclosures

- **Presenter Disclosure:** Financial: Shari Eberts is the co-author of Hear & Beyond, which is discussed in this presentation. She received an honorarium for this course. Non-financial: Shari Eberts is an HLAA board member. Financial: Kathy Cienkowski is an employee of UCONN. Non-financial: Kathy Cienkowski is a board member of the Eastern CT Chapter of HLAA.
 - A donation to the Eastern Connecticut Chapter of HLAA was made in lieu of an honorarium.
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- The applicability and accuracy of the course content may vary by the clinical, geographical, and cultural context; you should evaluate the course accordingly.
- As healthcare is rapidly evolving, new findings may change the validity of the information presented in this course. Providers should always consult the latest research and guidelines from professional associations.
- The interventions discussed in this course may be limited in generalizability, requiring practitioners to consider specific individual and population factors.
- The course may not cover all possible risk factors, diagnostic methods, or treatment options, and complex cases may require additional considerations.
- Healthcare providers should apply cultural competence and sensitivity to ensure effective and respectful care based on their patients' diverse needs.
- Providers should always evaluate the limitations of diagnostic and screening tools, considering their potential for false results as well as any ethical implications.
- It is the responsibility of course participants to critically evaluate the evidence from multiple sources to guide professional practice.

Learning Outcomes

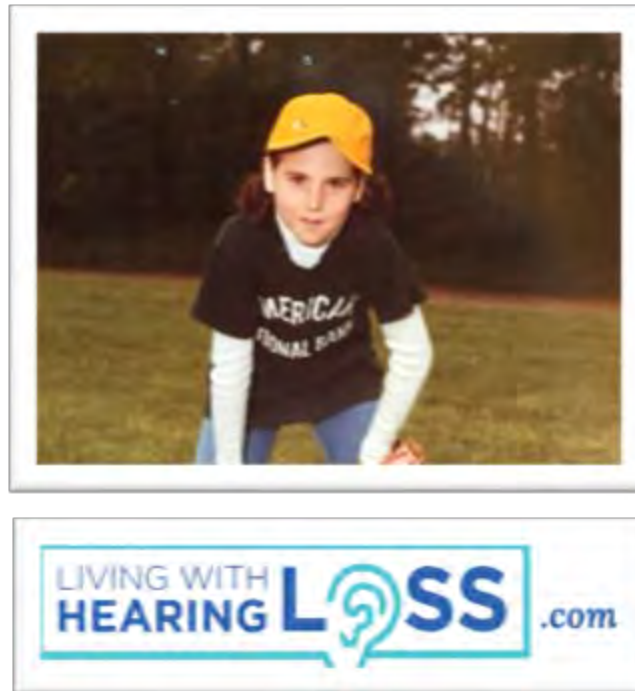
After this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe components of community-engaged learning.
- Discuss how patient lived experience can guide aural rehab plan development.
- Construct basic elements of a community-engaged learning plan.

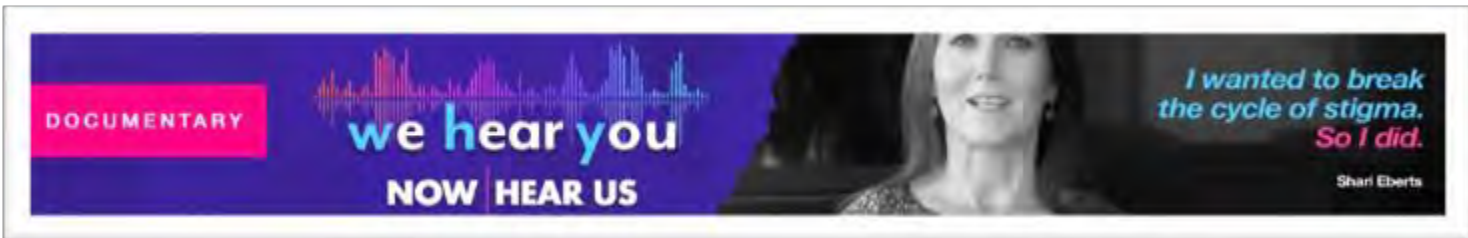
Today's Agenda

- **Who we are & why we decided to do this**
- What is community-engaged learning
- Lessons from Hear & Beyond for future HCPs
- Structuring engaged learning into a course
- How can you do this in your course
- Questions and discussion

My Hearing Loss Story: Stigma



Turning to Advocacy



What It's Like to Have Hearing Loss

- Impacts everything in your life
 - How you see yourself changes
 - Stigma keeps you from asking for help
 - Harder to work and pursue passions
- Negative impact on relationships
 - Communication can be difficult
 - Listening fatigue can be overwhelming
 - Public accessibility measures are limited

Why CEL is Critical

- First hearing care provider most people see
- Influence is critical in the hearing loss journey
- Care can feel focused on a device rather than on solutions
- Empathy and understanding build:
 - Stronger patient-provider relationships
 - Better hearing outcomes
 - Foundations for person-centered care

My Journey as an Educator



Why CEL is Critical

- **Increased community trust** (Preminger et al., 2014, Elkberg et al., 2017)
- **Higher participation** (Ismail et al., 2019)
- **Improved uptake of evidence-based interventions** (Parmar et al., 2021)



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Community-Engaged Learning

- Community-engaged learning (CEL) is an educational approach where students actively participate in community-based experiences as part of their academic training.
- This model connects classroom knowledge with real-world community needs, allowing students to apply academic theories and concepts in practical settings.

Benefits of CEL



- Establishes partnerships with community
- Hands-on field experience
- Development of critical thinking skills
- Enhances social responsibility and engagement
- Impact practice patterns (???)

(Zittleman, et al. 2024)

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“When we shifted our goal from hearing better to communicating better, that changed everything.”

—Hear & Beyond

Living Skillfully with Hearing Loss

- Understanding the Big Picture
 - What to expect on the hearing loss journey
 - We are not alone; there is help and support
- Embracing the 3-Legged Stool of Critical Skills
 - Embracing a broad range of technology to boost comprehension
 - Changing our attitudes about hearing loss with MindShifts
 - Non-technical communication strategies
- Putting It All Together
 - Relationships and support networks
 - Hearing Hacks

The 3-Legged Stool of Critical Skills

MINDSHIFTS



COMMUNICATION
GAME
CHANGERS

TECHNOLOGY

MINDSHIFTS

A New Approach to
Hearing Loss

"I HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO
CHANGE MY JOURNEY.
THE PERSON WITH THE MOST
POWER IN MY HEARING LOSS
SUCCESS IS ME."



Common Hearing Loss Attitudes

- Why me?
- Nobody understands what I'm going through.
- I want to hear better, the way I used to.
- I don't like to advertise my hearing loss. People will think I'm old or slow.
- My family and friends always forget about my hearing loss.
- Hearing aids are ugly, expensive, and don't always work.
- Who would want to hire me? Or love me? Or be my friend?
- I get angry at myself & others when we make communication mistakes.
- Everywhere I go, there is no access for people with hearing loss.

MindShifts:

A New Approach to Hearing Loss

- Our attitudes towards hearing loss affect our behaviors
- Better attitudes turn into better conversations
- Transformed attitudes can help your client:
 - Take charge of their own success
 - Try new tools
 - Be more assertive in having their needs met
 - Improve their working relationship with you

MindShift Example

Attitude	The Mindshift
Nobody understands what I'm going through.	Many people experience the same challenges as I do. I can learn from them. I'm not alone.

TECHNOLOGY

Plugging Into Better Hearing

"TECHNOLOGY IS MY FRIEND.
MY DEVICES LET ME HEAR
SOUNDS I HAD FORGOTTEN OR
HAD NEVER HEARD BEFORE.
THEY CONNECT ME TO OTHER
PEOPLE AND THE WORLD."

Technology: Plugging Into Better Hearing

- Explain what technology can and cannot do
- Hearing aids often the tool of choice, but more is required
 - Branded accessories (i.e., remote mics, TV streamers)
 - Smartphone apps: speech-to-text or sound alerts
 - External accommodations like CART and hearing loops
- **Our two MUST-HAVE features:**
 - Telecoils to be used with loop systems (small and large)
 - Bluetooth streaming capability

COMMUNICATION GAME CHANGERS

Transforming the Conversation

"I WANT TO COMMUNICATE
BETTER, AND IT TAKES MORE
THAN TECHNOLOGY TO DO
THIS. I MUST USE SOFTER
SKILLS TOO."

Communication Game Changers

- Don't hide, self-identify!
- Self-advocacy: knowing how to have your needs met
- No bluffing: eliminate this negative strategy
- Speechreading: visual cues
- Communication best practices: both speaker and listener

“The best HCPs are *communication specialists* who create personalized solutions, including both technology and non-technical strategies.”

—Hear & Beyond

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Structure Engaged-Learning into a Course

- Timeline of course activities (before things start)
 - Identify a community partner(s) aligned with your content
 - Create service activities that connect to learning objectives
 - Plan for reflection
- Student deliverables
 - Incorporate regular reflection prompts to ensure that students are connecting engaged learning to academic material
- Results/student feedback
 - Solicit feedback for evaluation
- Areas for improvement
 - What's next?

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How To Do This in Your Course

Community-engaged learning in a hearing aids class:

- NOT a traditional service-learning class
- Includes two opportunities for authentic engagement with community stakeholders.
- Projects
 - Book review
 - Hearing loss support groups

Book Review

- Students write a critical review of Hear & Beyond by Shari Eberts and Gael Hannan. The goal of this assignment is for students to gain perspective on using the patient journey to inform clinical practice.
- First class of the semester began with a group meeting with Shari and the students.
- Written assignment was an adaption of questions posed as part of the Hear & Beyond Book Club.

HLAA Experience

- Each student must attend one HLAA (in-person) meeting.
- Each student completes a guided reflection (based on the 5R framework)
 1. Provide a brief description of the experience.
 2. How did it relate to your own knowledge and past experiences?
 3. How did what happened make me feel? What surprised you by this experience and why?
 4. What is the most important “takeaway” from it & why?
 5. How might I incorporate "takeaways" into my own clinical practice?

Qualitative Assessment: What did we learn?

- From the students: *About Hear & Beyond*
 - "This is not just a book for those recently diagnosed with hearing loss (although it serves a great purpose for that!). It should be studied and read by clinicians so we can understand how people cope with hearing loss before coming to see us for the first time, and how our clinical choices are interpreted, whether right or wrong"
 - "We learn in our classes about the struggles and problems for people with hearing loss, and sometimes I feel like we have lost the human aspectI also really want to work towards discussing support groups and other resources with first time patients."
 - As a future clinician, I want to emphasize to patients that "They deserve to participate in their life."

Qualitative Assessment: What did we learn?

- From the students: About support meeting
 - "My biggest takeaway is that those affected with hearing loss need more advocacy and awareness, some of which can be helped by actions that myself as someone involved in the hearing healthcare field can carry out."
 - "It got me thinking about how little I truly know about the resources available to patients when they leave the clinic and what resources may be available for financial concerns or for individuals who do not necessarily want to pursue amplification."
 - "The most important takeaway from this experience for me is that I don't only want to serve a population, but I also want to support them as they move through a world that is not thinking of them."

What Did We Learn?

- From the instructor:
 - Flexibility is key
 - Debriefing is critical
 - Community engagement can help identify gaps in the curriculum
 - I need to do it again (and again)

Future Directions

- Include the patient's perspective
 - Conferences
 - Publications
- Incorporate lived experience in student curriculums
 - Books/films
 - Personal testimony
- Validate the impact on client satisfaction and outcomes
- Help educate consumers on their role

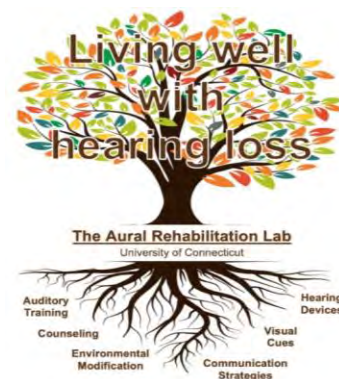
Thank you! Questions?

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www.HearAndBeyond.com



<http://aural.rehab.uconn.edu>

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