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## BENEFITS OF GROUP AR TO YOUR CLINIC

### INTRODUCTION

The benefits of Aural Rehabilitation to the hearing impaired patient have been well documented in the literature. Often overlooked are the benefits of an AR program to the audiologist and the clinic, such as increased patient satisfaction and reduction in the number of follow-up appointments needed.

Due to the various VA performance measures and directives that VA audiologists strive to meet each month and each year, there are limits to how long a patient can/should wait to be tested and fit. In an effort to move patients through there is a tendency to limit the time spent counseling patients. Consequently, patients leave with appropriate amplification but also often with unrealistic expectations and limited communication strategies training.

In the VA, Audiology tends to be one of the busiest clinics with a large patient caseload. Owing to this heavy schedule it is easy to think that taking time out to run a weekly AR class would create a backlog of patients. The data collected since the inception of the Living With Hearing Loss program at the VA Healthcare System Medical Center shows that this is not the case; rather we were able to reduce the number of patients returning to the clinic for walk-in visits and/or individual follow-up visits freeing up more time for new/other patients.

### METHODOLOGY

Data documenting the number of patients seen in walk-in clinic with regards to hearing aid complaints one month prior to the implementation of group AR was compared to data documenting the number of patients seen in that same clinic one year after the program's inception. To judge improved patient satisfaction we reviewed post-class evaluation forms regarding patient perception of the quality of care provided.

### RESULTS

A review of the data revealed a significant decrease in the number of patients seen in walk-in clinic with complaints regarding their hearing aids and unrealistic expectations for hearing aid performance. This decrease in walk-in clinic patient load has afforded more time for each clinician during their work day. This time is now available for new patients evaluations, student training, and various other activities within the Medical Center.

In addition, the majority of patients that have attended the class offered positive feedback regarding their perceived quality of the care. This paired with suggestions on how to improve group AR has facilitated the progression of the class over the past 3.5 years to now include things such as satellite broadcasting of the class to more remotely located outpatient clinics and the introduction of information packets designed for patient's spouse and family members. Constant monitoring allows the class to continually evolve to meet the needs of the patients and their family members.