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## A PWHL at a Professional Conference

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When I speak at hearing care professional (HCP) conferences, it's not unusual to feel a bit isolated, like a fish out of water. *All these people know stuff that I don't.*

Even though I'm going to speak to them about important things that will enhance their practice and relationships with clients like me, I can feel an invisible barrier.

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The division goes beyond our respective roles to the uniqueness of my being there in the first place. How seldom the authentic consumer voice is found on the professional conference agenda amazes me. *Is she going to talk about the emotional stuff? Or how we need to do our jobs better?*

And the answer to those questions is *sort of-yes*. But speakers with hearing loss, like me, also offer the important real-life perspective that supports aural rehab of your clients, in a way they can't express. They don't know how. When they leave your office with a newly fitted, wondrous hearing aid, it's a shock to find they can't hear like we used to. And this may never happen, but successful communication *can!* It just takes time, a nurturing relationship with you and a broad array of communication technologies.

Last weekend, my co-author and fellow advocate Shari Eberts and I spoke at AudBoss, an American conference of independent hearing clinic owners. To the best of our knowledge, we were the only participants with hearing loss, evident in the lack of communication access. No captioning, no FM, and no looped room. We used a speech-to-text app to follow along, which was moderately successful, especially in the less technical information.

Aside from that issue, we learned a great deal, especially about the challenges and pressures on the delivery of modern hearing care. It was an exceptional experience to sit in the audience and listen to speakers talking about becoming better private practice owners and better connecting with their patients, with *us*.

Then it was our turn to talk – *How to Help Your Clients Live More Skillfully with Hearing Loss* – and it was a fit, the barriers were gone. Not only was our message heard, but participants told us afterwards how refreshing, wonderful and crucial it was to have the client perspective delivered constructively.

Every few years I'm invited to speak at the CAA conference, as I did last year in 2022 to discuss the positive impact of family-centered care. For me as a hearing health advocate, it's an opportunity to strengthen relationships and to share best practices on the ultimate goal: a successful hearing care professional who supports the client on their hearing loss journey to become a better, even skilled, communicator.

Consider including the important consumer voice (there are a lot of us out here) in your next professional conference, however small – it's the one that's been missing!

