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Dr. Chuck Berlin, PhD., ... *Superhearo*- he will be missed.

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Once upon a time in the late 1990s, there was a 7-month-old boy who was diagnosed with bilateral Auditory Neuropathy Spectrum Disorder (ANSD). The child's audiologist was hesitant to put hearing aids on the infant because he appeared to hear soft speech/environmental sounds and respond appropriately to his name and spoken language used by his family. A repeat ABR confirmed the presence of ANSD. His audiologist referred the infant and his family to another audiologist, an aural rehabilitation practitioner, for early intervention to confirm the child’s functional auditory access to speech sounds and to monitor his listening and spoken language development. The early intervention was Auditory-Verbal Therapy (AVT), a type of intervention

that experts in ANSD did not recommend.

The aural rehabilitation practitioner contacted Dr. Charles “Chuck” Berlin, an expert in ANSD (and yes, he didn’t like AVT) for his guidance. She explained that she observed that the child was detecting all sounds of the speech spectrum and was responding appropriately to the family’s spoken communication, nursery rhymes, and songs… behaviours typically not seen in children with ANSD. Dr. Berlin reviewed the audiologist’s clinical findings and then called the family to hear their story, observations, concerns and dreams. Dr. Berlin agreed to become part of the team of professionals who would help this young boy and his family navigate the uncharted territory of ANSD.

Thus began a seven-year collaborative relationship that consisted of meetings on the phone to discuss observations, results of assessments, reviews of audiograms, and plans for intervention. He even took time at conferences to review video clips of therapy sessions that showed the boy’s listening and spoken language prowess. Baffling and unexpected observations did not seem to faze Dr. Berlin. His thorough understanding of the science of ANSD and its’ effect on the timing aspects of speech helped the family and professionals understand the reason for this boy’s unique listening and spoken communication skills. His time and expertise lowered everyone’s anxiety and helped the family confidently move forward on their journey of living with ANSD. A unique journey that confirmed that ANSD indeed has several presentations that require different, perhaps unorthodox interventions.

The above story is one of many stories that have Dr. Berlin called the a “*superhearo*.”

His years of research and collaboration with colleagues around the world led to significant advancements in understanding ANSD, improving confidence in the diagnostic and intervention process. As a passionate advocate for individuals with hearing challenges, Dr. Berlin aided countless individuals with significant hearing difficulties (my favourite being those with severe to profound hearing loss), championing their hearing wellness and connection to the world around them.

Colleagues, professionals, and students found Dr. Berlin to be a brilliant partner in hearing research and care, an open-minded professional with common sense and bravery, and an exceptional teacher who could make complicated concepts easier to understand with relatable and humorous analogies.

His contribution to respectful care and attention in his professional duties and passions was remarkable, and his dedication to his favorite soundscapes, particularly jazz music, showcased his understanding of the extraordinary benefits that music provides to the auditory centers of the brain and the heart.

Both individuals with hearing loss (and their families) and the professionals who serve them owe an extraordinary amount of gratitude to Dr. Berlin and his family for their support and dedication. His passion for optimizing hearing, listening, and communication potential will remain unmatched, however, I’m confident that many will strive to continue his legacy for years to come.

As for the boy with ANSD and his family? They are living life to the fullest, sustained by the knowledge and confidence Dr. Berlin imparted. They will never forget his voice, counsel and positive energy.

And that aural rehabilitation practitioner who practiced AVT and brought Dr. Berlin along for the ride (yes…he came to respect and like AVT)? She will never forget the way his eyes lit up with delight when he watched a video of the boy debating (Dr. Berlin sure loved debates!) the rules of a card game and singing the “Spiderman” song.

After all, that song was perfect for the *superhearo* that Dr. Berlin was.

(picture courtesy of Karen MacIver-Lux)