

More on Audiometric Technician Training

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Last issue, Alberto Behar shed some light on Ontario's scarcity of training courses for those wishing to be audiometric technicians. He provided some explanation as to why this void exists and connecting the dots is fairly straightforward: The Ministry of Labour (MOL) does not require that hearing tests be part of a workplace hearing conservation program. Employers therefore do not need to hire audiometric technicians. Few people want to pay for a course to become qualified to perform a job that is not considered necessary and institutions are not likely to offer courses that are not popular. It makes sense, and the resulting picture is that without a certification process for audiometric technicians, employers who wish to exceed the requirements set out by the MOL, do not know the level of skill and qualifications of audiometric testers.

Admittedly this is bragging, but in BC the situation is markedly different. WorkSafeBC, or the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB), has a longstanding history of pro-activity in the world of noise and noise induced hearing loss and in the early 70s, the WCB recognized that ONIHL needed to be assessed. When the University of British Columbia (UBC) produced its first two audiologists in 1971, the WCB, with incredible foresight, scooped up one of the graduates in order to develop and conduct training courses for industrial audiometric technicians. This army of technicians would then be able to help determine the current state of ONIHL in the province.

While no other jurisdictions in Canada could offer ideas, similar interests were brewing south of the border, and ultimately BC's Audiometric Technician course was adapted from a course available in the US, developed by the not yet officially formed or named Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC).

In 1975, WCB hired three additional audiologists and opened a department to perform clinical and rehabilitation assessments of workers claiming compensation for the newly compensable disease of occupational noise induced hearing loss, as well as oversee "industrial audiology" and the training of industrial audiometric technicians.

The rest is history as they say, and annual hearing tests are required by regulation, in BC in industries where hazardous noise is present. This is not meant to imply that things are perfect out west; there is considerable room for improvement in BC as well. Typically audiometric technicians charge employers on a "per test" basis, which causes concern that test quality is compromised in favour of quantity. Though "refresher" courses for audiometric technicians are required every two years, ensuring a consistent level of quality is not without its challenges.

In the past few years, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) has been focussing on updating their standards that deal with occupational noise, and the prevention of occupational noise induced hearing loss. CSA Z1007 Hearing Loss Prevention Management Standard (now in the writing) will recommend annual hearing tests for workers exposed to hazardous noise, promote consistency in testing practices, as well as direct attention to the CSA Standard Z107.6 which currently outlines

content for Audiometric Technician Training courses. Let's hope that in the near future, more regulatory bodies recognise the importance of the CSA standards and adopt them into their framework. It is likely that this extra guidance would have an impact on jurisdictions such as Ontario. There is reason for optimism.