

Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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Equality and Equity

Our cover feature article in this issue of CanadianAudiologist is “Spotlight on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Canadian University Audiology Programs”, by Dekota Clayton, Anne Griffin, Dana Song and Janine Verge. Equity has always fascinated me, even when quite early in my audiology career.

I recall having a conversation with a friend about volume control telephone accessibility. I was a member of a Canadian working group to convince the CRTC to have flux coils in all telephones and a larger supply of volume controls for those hard of hearing consumers who required this. My friend asked whether all telephones in a hotel should be compatible with hearing aids for the “occasional” guest who may require it and wouldn’t that be an undue burden for the hotel?

And this is one of the salient elements of the difference between equality and equity. My answer was, and still is, that I compared it to wheel chair ramps which in the 1980s were still not all that common. It would not be a detriment to the ambulatory public and it would allow access for those who required it, even if it was only for one or two people in a month. And my opinion was that it would not be an undue burden for the hotels, especially since it was the manufactures’ (mostly Northern Telecom) and distributors’ (e.g., Bell Canada) responsibilities.

Another aspect of the difference between equality and equity is that “equality” is quite discriminatory. I hope to never live in an “equal society”; I would much rather live in an “equitable society”. Providing everyone with the same basic tools may sound good on the surface, but some people require different tools (or policies) or more tools to function. Saying that all people are equal implies that only certain tools would be necessary, and it also means that other necessary tools would be limited, “unfair”, or simply unavailable.

I have heard many, mostly right-wing politicians, over the years advocate for equality as if it were a “mother and apple pie” statement. But the provision of some tool (or policy) that may benefit, a sometimes-small population, would provide them with access which others may take for granted. This would be equitable, despite being non-equal.

Equity is also applicable when there is systemic discrimination towards certain groups. And being systemic (and long-standing) it is often difficult to know why a set of policies have provided a certain set of limitations. In this case equality is a covertly discriminatory policy; the answer partially lies in economics and whether there is true access to a program or service for some people- clearly a systemic issue that needs to be addressed on a number of levels.

And even after forty years, my friend may still ask why a hotel needs to have accessible telephones, but at least the hotels do have them.

We also have another article in this issue “Unperceived hearing loss among Canadians aged 40 to 79”, by Pamela L. Ramage-Morin, Rex Banks, Dany Pineault and Maha Atrach. This article underscores another element of the difference between equity and equality. We simply sometimes don’t know when we have difficulty hearing. Hearing loss, also known as the “invisible handicap” is typically characterized by a slow progression without pain or anything obvious... truly a difficult disability to get a handle on.

On a more technical and everyday clinical basis, we have other exciting articles in this issue as well ranging from a discussion of a mannequin to assist in learning about proper probe tube placement by Rob Koch , to a discussion of whether hearing aid use can offset cognitive decline under the Mysteries of the Hearing Brain banner by Samira Anderson.

I wish you all a pleasant spring season, and hopefully we will have fewer restrictions on by summer.

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Editor in Chief