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Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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Sunflowers, OTCs, Directional Errors, and Asymmetries… The Stuff Of Audiology

Audiology is a broad field, touching on evoked response audiometry, face-to-face clinical assessment and intervention, counseling, education, technology, and more. As a field we sometimes refer to hearing loss and deafness as an “invisible handicap” or “non-apparent disability”. In her Access Points feature in this issue of Canadian Audiologist, disability rights lawyer Lorin MacDonald introduces us to a program that has been around since 2024 called the Sunflower Program. For me, it was an introduction- I simply had never heard about it before, but Lorin gave a most delightful talk at the recent annual conference of the Canadian Academy of Audiology in Moncton, New Brunswick, on this program.

From Lorin’s Access Points feature:

“The Sunflower program uses a recognizable sunflower symbol to allow people to voluntarily indicate that they have a non-apparent disability and may need assistance, understanding, or additional time. Its green lanyard with yellow sunflowers, offers a discreet way to communicate this possibility without having to explain a diagnosis to everyone encountered along the journey.

The program includes participating airports in Canada and internationally. In 2024, Air Canada became the first airline in North America to adopt the Sunflower, and the lanyard is now recognized at more than two dozen Canadian airports as well as on board Air Canada, Rouge and Express flights.”

Photo by Neil Juggins via Alamy

And the field of Audiology is broad indeed. Our Lead-off cover feature article is written by Nicholas Reed, Alison Huang, and Jennifer Deal- with the last two authors from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. The article is entitled “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids in the United States: a public health perspective after 4 years”. As the title suggests, it focuses on the American experience with OTCs. While introducing a new FDA category to improve access is understandable, and in some sense quite laudable, there is concern about the trade-off between safety and accessibility. No one wants access to substandard forms of amplification. The cover feature in the last issue of Canadian Audiologist was exactly about this, and again, written by Lorin MacDonald. It can be found here [Access Points: When “Accessible” Isn’t the Same as “Safe”: What Canada Should Know Before Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids Arrive | Canadian Audiologist].

This issue of Canadian Audiologist has a wonderful article written by Andrew Brown from the University of Washington on directional errors with hearing protection devices. Industrial use of hearing protection has long been a problem, especially when it comes to localizing warning sounds, and it is understandable that many workers either remove their hearing protection or wear it in a non-optimal way. Improving awareness of directional cues can go a long way towards minimizing future occupational hearing loss.

We also have articles on asymmetries with audiometric symmetrical hearing losses for people with mild hearing loss, reminding us that the audiogram is far from the “gold standard”- but a standard that is almost universally used in policy decisions around the world. This should be read along side another article in this issue, on the new policy of the Ontario Workers’ Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), also in this issue- a new occupational noise policy, with both its strengths and its continued archaic statements that are not based on any valid clinical research.

And like previous issues of CanadianAudiologist.ca we have something for everyone, ranging from our regular columns to announcements in our Industry News section, and also pictures from our recent annual CAA conference in our CAA News section.

I wish you all a pleasant late fall and early winter, and a safe and relaxing upcoming holiday season.

Marshall Chasin, AuD

Editor in Chief… and also President Elect CAA.