

"Emerging hearing loss solutions: How the newest ideas may change everything" University of Minnesota Arizona Minne-college, February 2017

1. Hearing loss is an important hidden issue that affects individual lives and society in substantial ways.

There is still stigma around hearing loss.

It's still invisible and hidden. One of my favorite sayings: Your hearing loss is more visible than the hearing aid you don't want to wear.

Most importantly, it has significant effects on one's life. Losing that connection with people results in important but unnecessary declines in cognition, memory, and the like.

2. Hearing loss is difficult to treat and requires investment on the part of the user

I'm often asked why hearing aids don't work better than they do, why they cost so much.

They've come a long way. They're much better than they were even 10 years ago: feedback, comfort, fit, size, and wearability. Where they're not better: in noise and in sound quality.

3. A lot of the hearing loss effects are in the brain;

The loss is not going to 'recover' immediately.

Hearing devices can't be expected to work like glasses. They don't solve the underlying problem (like finding the right focal point for eyeglasses).

It's more like macular degeneration: where the cells are missing, making sounds louder doesn't fill in what's missing.

4. Similar hearing losses don't have similar results. We give users (who have similar hearing losses) control over their hearing aids. What do they do? Incredible variability.

Is the variability in the ear? Perhaps it's due to our genetics (probably the biggest factor), your illness history, or your noise exposure.

Is it in the brain? As our hearing declines, our brain adapts (and not in a good way), so that restoring loudness restores a whole lot that the brain has learned to live without.

Is it the background noise? Or your own personality?

5. New devices are on the horizon

The FDA is still weighing in; it should be soon. They will be apps, or room speakers, or remote microphones that connect your phone, hearing aids, and doorbells.

The sticker shock will be better; but they will not be perfect at the start.

We're going to need to be active partners with our health care professionals.

The need for personal investment and hard work will still be high, maybe higher than before

Ironically, the improvements in technology may require MORE from us as active participants and not less. The role of audiologists will change but will still be critically important

6. Hearing health care is a partnership between the person with hearing loss, their family, and their professionals: audiologists and physicians.