

# Bone-Anchored Hearing Aid is Music to One Patient's Ears

*Better Speech and Hearing Month spotlights innovative solution for patients with sudden hearing loss*

**E**lementary-school principal, Jennifer Snyder, of Lebanon, remembers the exact moment she lost hearing in her right ear. She was interviewing for a position as a school counselor when she began to feel that her ear was stopped up. Attributing it to sinuses, she simply adjusted her seat so that she could hear her interviewers and continued with the meeting.

She landed the job.

But with her ear issue persisting, she visited the doctor and learned she had fluid on her ears. Medication didn't help and several weeks later Jennifer saw a specialist who informed her she was deaf in her right ear.

"I burst out in tears," she said. "He told me that a virus had attacked the nerve endings in the inner ear and that a hearing aid wouldn't benefit me."

Jennifer was careful to conceal her condition, sharing the news with only a few of her closest friends.

"I felt that people would look at me differently — like damaged goods — if they thought I was less than perfect," she said.

When going to meetings she made it a habit to arrive early so that she could select a seat on the end of the table where there would be no one on her right side. And she did the same whenever riding in a car with other teachers or administrators. She worried that her inability to hear might cause others to think her rude or unkind.

"As a counselor/administrator, I have always been worried that someone would speak to me and that I would not hear them and they would think I was ignoring them or being unkind," Jennifer said. "I was even afraid that I might lose my job if people found out I had difficulty hearing in a crowded room, which our job descriptions say we have to be able to do."

Jennifer dealt with these limitations as well as she could, though she always hoped for a solution that would restore her hearing. Every five years she visited the doctor to have her ears checked



Jennifer Snyder

and to ask if there were any new technologies that might help her. Each time there was nothing. Then she learned about the bone-anchored hearing aid (BAHA), and after being tested, Jennifer was deemed a candidate for the device. But BAHA was expensive and her insurance refused to cover the costs.

Five years later, while having her hearing tested, she was again told that she was a good candidate for the BAHA. And at the encouragement of Springfield audiologist, Dr. Shari Norval, she tried her insurance once more. This time they agreed to cover the costs.

In June, Jennifer underwent surgery to have the BAHA's titanium abutment installed on her skull. Then in September, after several months of healing, and with the abutment now ossified in the mastoid area of the skull, she was ready to receive the processor, which attaches

externally. When Dr. Norval attached this component, tears came to Jennifer's eyes because she could hear again.

"It was the miracle that I had been waiting for!" she said. "To hear again has liberated me from being so restricted in my choices, what I do, where I can go. I have even been able to change the placement of my desk."

Jennifer has had the BAHA device for about eight months and says she can wear it everywhere except for the water. It fits right behind her ear and cannot be seen.

"I feel like Dr. Estrem and Dr. Norval at St. John's gave me a lifeline back to the hearing world," she said. "I can't thank them enough!"

May is Better Speech and Hearing Month, an event designed to help raise awareness about communication disorders. It also promotes treatment options that can improve the quality of life for those with speech, understanding or hearing difficulties.

**St. John's Clinic-Audiology is here to help. We offer hearing tests and complete information about bone-anchored hearing aids and other solutions. For more information, please call St. John's Clinic-Audiology at 417-820-5071.**