

OSARC MONTHLY MEETING
12/13/2023 12:30pm
MINUTES

Greetings: Joan Borovoy, OSARC Chairperson, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees

Introductions: Joan introduced current board members:

Mark Lewis, Acting Vice Chair
Susan O'Brien, Secretary
Colleen Cox, Consultant to the Board
Judith Lovell, Volunteer
Jay Warshofsky, COMRO rep

OSA Staff members providing technical assistance/support on Zoom:

Rob Spencer, OSA Media Director
Megan Wofsy, OSA Asst to the Chairperson

Joan explained Zoom etiquette.

Presentation: Guest presenter Nancy Gilston, Au.D.

Ms. Gilston is an audiologist with 30 years of professional experience. Nancy has a degree in comparative literature from Brown University and worked as a writer for the UN for ten years. She received a Masters and Doctorate in Audiology from Hunter College, CUNY. From 1987 to 2009, she worked for neurotologist Kenneth Brookler, M.D. who studied hearing and balance uniquely focusing on how metabolic factors can control hearing and balance. Nancy has worked for the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, as well as the otolaryngology department of Cornell University Hospital for the past 30 years. While at New York Eye and Ear, she did vestibular testing as well as cochlear implant evaluations and programming. In the otolaryngology office, she evaluates hearing for individuals from infants to adults. In addition, Nancy has maintained a private practice where she has evaluated hearing and dispensed hearing aids for over 30 years.

How we hear:

Ear canals are fully formed by 10 weeks after conception and become functional at 25 weeks. The cochlea, a cavity in the inner ear, develops at that point. It is the only place in the body where a bone is housing another bone (cochlea), making it very hard and dense.

Vibrations of sound send signals from the outer ear through the ear canal and the middle ear structures to stimulate the hair cells of the cochlea. Those hair cell signals send the information to our brains so that we can code the sounds to make sense.

Preventing hearing loss:

The outer portion of the cochlea contains the higher frequency information and as the cochlea turns in on the shell, the mid and lower frequencies are located

It is possible, when we hear loud sounds in the environment, whether from music, sirens or industrial noise, there is a chance that the outer hair cells could become impaired. As a result, high frequency hearing loss is often associated with noise exposure.

One way to avoid hearing loss is to protect your ears from noise exposure. Cover your ears when sirens go by or on subway platforms. If you are at a loud wedding or concert and not wearing ear protection (specific for noise exposure) you should limit your time of exposure by leaving the venue for a few minutes, so you don't have constant exposure. **OSHA standards say if you expose yourself to 85 decibels for 6 hours you will have a hearing loss.** If you increase the time you are exposed to 85dB or increase the decibels, you will decrease the amount of time needed to cause hearing loss.

Typical Noise Exposure:

In the home:

60-85 dB - Vacuum cleaner
60-95 dB - Hair dryer
80-90 dB - Blender or food processor
110 dB - Baby crying

Work:

90-115 dB - Subway
110 dB - Power saw, leaf blower
120 dB - Ambulance siren

Recreation:

85 dB - Heavy traffic, loud restaurant
95-110 dB - Motorcycle
110 dB - Music club, symphony concert, car horn, rock concert
112 dB - Personal music player on high
117 dB - Football game stadium

Earplugs:

Over-the-counter ear plugs are helpful for different purposes. The squishy orange ones don't protect well against high frequencies but are good for music. Rubber or soft wax earplugs are better overall at reducing decibel exposure.

How do you know if you have hearing loss:

An audiogram is a way to determine what you hear, particularly in speech frequencies from 250-8K Hertz. An audiogram is conducted by an Audiologist.

When you look at an audiogram, frequencies run across, and decibels of loudness run down. So as the numbers of decibels increase, there is a more significant hearing loss. Generally, noise-induced hearing loss will occur in the frequencies between 4K and 6K Hertz.

Other factors that may contribute to hearing loss:

Genetic abnormalities

Chemicals - There are medications that are ototoxic or harmful to your hearing, such as some antibiotics. Some mycin antibiotics are ototoxic but may be used to save someone's life, There are also some chemotherapy drugs that are ototoxic.

Physical - If you had a serious blow to the side of your head and fractured your temporal bone, it would impact your hearing.

Metabolic - Ms. Gilson's work with Dr. Kenneth Brookler, a neurotologist who spent his career studying the ear, focused much research on the fact that the ear is the only place where bone is housed in bone. He also believed that high triglycerides, problems with thyroid function and low levels of Vitamin D should all be examined as factors in hearing loss.

Conclusion

To protect yourself against hearing loss:

- Wear hearing protection that blocks sound at high frequencies
- Monitor your hearing to ensure it is stable
- If there is hearing loss impacting your communication, consider investing in hearing aids
- Eat a diet lower in carbohydrates and sugars and increase good fat and proteins

COMRO Report: by Jay Warshofsky. Joan Garripa also attended for OSARC.

COMRO is the Council of Municipal Retiree Organizations (City and State). Jay reported that long time COMRO member Vinnie Montalbano died. He was a long time activist in COMRO who will be missed.

Jay and two members from the Managerial Employees Association presented an annual pension report. Their report is based on the NYC Comptroller's annual financial report about the five NYC pension systems. They reported on the number of people contributing and how much is being contributed to each system, how many pensioners and survivors are getting pensions and the average pension each is receiving.

The Comptroller also looked at fund assets. The group reported on the contributions by working people and by the City and the market performance of the funds. In 2022, the assets went down, but this year the assets have grown by 250%. This makes the five pension funds worth roughly \$250 billion. Their conclusion is that City pensions are in good shape, especially as compared with other cities.

Anyone who is interested in receiving a copy of Jay's report should contact him at the union office or email him at jwarshofsky@osaunion.org.

A discussion of the COMRO constitution and by-laws was held, reviewing the weighted system of voting. There was no quorum at the meeting, so no action was taken.

Health Insurance Status Report

- Aetna lawsuit – The NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees (NYCOPSR) won a lawsuit to stop the City’s movement of retirees into Aetna Medicare Advantage. NYC lost its initial appeal and has now appealed to a higher NYS court. The belief is that nothing else will happen with the attempt to move us to Aetna until this suit is resolved.
- Co-pay lawsuit- After a lawsuit by NYCOPSR, collection of co-pays has stopped, but NYC is appealing the lawsuit.
- NYCOPSR has been attempting to pass Intro 1099 in the City Council to stop, in a more permanent fashion, the NYC/MLC attempts to move retirees off Medicare
- State and federal legislation (introduced by Rep.Torres and Maliotakis) have been introduced, similar to NYC Council Intro 1099.

Jay believes the current plan by NYC and the MLC is to make one plan to cover all active workers and retirees and remove all other currently available options.

Medicare Advantage plans are being denied much more frequently, especially in rural areas.

Jay also reported that a letter signed by 2,500 representatives of NYC unions and individuals opposing the move to a Medicare Advantage plan by NYC and the MLC is circulating with plans to be published in newspapers soon. Jay signed it.

On February 13th, there will be a special election to replace George Santos. Tom Suozzi is the designated Democratic candidate for the NY 3rd district. Please vote.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, January 10th at 12:30pm. The topic in January will be a speaker from Physicians for a National Health Plan to discuss national health insurance and Medicare Advantage.