

May is Better Hearing And Speech Month

BY KENDRA NEUGEBAUER, AUD, CCC-A
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Our role as health care providers goes beyond the work we put in at our clinics day in and day out. We are always concerned with how we can make improvements to the services provided to our patients. Sometimes, those improvements come down to regulations administered by the government. One way that I have tried to become more involved is through our state and national associations.



Neugebauer

In January 2014, I was appointed to the American-Speech-Language-Hearing Association's (ASHA) Audiology Advisory Council (AAC). As an Advisory Council member, the lone representative from South Dakota, my responsibilities include advising and providing recommendations to the ASHA Board of Directors in order to shape the future of the association and its approach to serving patients with speech, language and hearing difficulties. Ultimately, we want to do our best to carry out the vision of ASHA: to make effective communication, a human right, accessible and achievable for all.

One of the ways in which the AAC tries to push for these improvements to the services audiologists provide is by taking part in ASHA's annual Capitol Hill Day. This year, on March 13, I traveled to Washington, DC, and was privileged to meet with staff from South Dakota's political representatives, discussing legislation directly impacting our patients with hearing difficulties. Some of the key legislative pieces catching our attention are highlighted below:

- Support the Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit — This measure would allow for an income tax credit of \$500 per hearing aid every five years toward the purchase of hearing aids and was introduced to the House of Representatives on April 17, 2015. The goal of this bill is to relieve the financial burden associated with the purchase of hearing aids, as most insurance companies do not provide any coverage for those instruments.

- Support Expanded Medicare Coverage of Audiology services — This bill would allow for both diagnostic and treatment services to be covered by Medicare. Current Medicare benefits limit coverage to only diagnostic hearing and balance services. The proposed bill would continue to exclude the coverage of hearing aids; however, other auditory and vestibular treatment would be covered. All of these services are already covered by Medicare when provided by other qualified health care professionals.

- Preserve Medicaid coverage of Audiology services — As the Affordable Care Act evolves, Medicaid programs will continue to be changed. With this legislation, the goal is to preserve those audiology services that are already being covered and oppose any cuts or limitations to those services. The current Medicaid program allows children up to 21 years of age, medically necessary services and equipment that can assist with their identified hearing difficulties.

- Support reauthorization of the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program — This allows for the continuation of a highly successful initiative to have all infants screened for hearing loss and receive timely and appropriate services if a hearing loss is identified. According to the CDC, the EHDI grants so far have resulted in about 97 percent of infants being screened within their first month of life.

- Support Medicare Telehealth Coverage for Audiology Services — Coming from a fairly rural state, access to specialty services, such as audiologists, can be hard to find. The use of telehealth would allow audiologists to provide effective services to patients from a distance, which would be equivalent to the quality of service they receive face-to-face.

- Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) — Audiologists play an integral role in the identification and management of hearing loss and auditory processing disorders, which consequently cause language delays and reading difficulties. Students deserve the right to qualified professionals who can help them with personal and classroom amplification systems, allowing them to hear and recognize classroom communication which will in turn assist in development of crucial early literacy skills. This bill will allow for continued access to these services.

- Oppose the appointment of hearing aid specialists to the VA—H.R. 353 would allow for the appointment of hearing aid specialists to the VA system, which appears to be unnecessary and redundant since hearing aid specialists are already employed by the VA. While we understand the goal of this legislation is to allow for greater access to hearing health care services for veterans, it does not address the implications and limitations of hearing aid specialists versus audiologists. Hearing aid specialists are limited to hearing aid related services and have not completed the appropriate competencies in wax removal, tinnitus management, cochlear implants, balance evaluation and treatment and more advanced hearing evaluations beyond the standard hearing test that audiologists must complete.

A CALL TO ACTION

If you or a family member struggle with the consequences of hearing loss, or if any of these pieces of legislation are important to you, please take this time to advocate for services you deserve! The most effective way to express your concerns is by writing a personal letter or email describing your personal situation, the need for the services provided and how these pieces of legislation will impact you. Contact information for your political representatives can be found on the following website: <https://www.congress.gov/members>. Remember, your voice matters!

Some Recommendations For Improving Perceptions Of Farming

BY DR. MIKE ROSMANN
Sponsored by L&C Behavioral Health

How farmers care for their land and animals are opinion-laden and emotionally sensitive subjects for nearly all farmers. Their feelings are understandable.

Any threat to the capacity of agricultural producers to satisfy humans' basic needs for food and materials for clothing, fuel and shelter triggers an alarm because of their "agrarian imperative" to produce essentials for life. The source of the threat makes little difference, whether low markets, unwelcome government policies, unfavorable weather or something else.

There is much tussling among individuals and organizations about how food, fiber and renewable fuels should be produced. Several farmers whom I contacted shared their thoughts concerning the previous two columns about the public perception of farmers.

Their feedback motivated me to ask several more farmers: "Is what Americans think about farming a big deal?" Among the ten farmers with whom I conversed or exchanged emails, seven were from Iowa and one each from Illinois, Minnesota and Nebraska.

All but one person agreed that perceptions of the general public about farming deserve more attention and responses than they are getting from farmers. The farmers varied in what they feel needs to be said.

Agricultural production methods which respect the people engaged in farming, as well as the land, water and air as their primary concerns, are deemed likely to succeed in public opinion realms. A fair income is expected by nearly all Americans, the commentators said, but not at the cost of exploiting resources that harm current or future producers and their families, and neither the resources needed for agriculture nor the consumers of agricultural products.

Only a small minority of agricultural producers regularly violate environmental and health standards, the farmers agreed. Two people said habitual violators seem more concerned about profits and disregard the harm their production methods pose.



Dr. Mike ROSMANN

Three farmers said habitual violators have the right to farm the way they want but they have to bear the consequences. They said habitual violators of accepted conservation and health practices and ethical standards of raising livestock not only attract negative public attention, they

deserve public outrage, such as being interrogated in person, by the press, or undergoing criminal prosecution. All but two of the farmers I interviewed told me violators damage the public perception of agricultural producers and sometimes prompt rules changes and legislative actions that end up being a burden for producers.

What can agricultural producers do to advance an accurate understanding of their farming aims and methods? I asked the farmers I visited with. Here are their recommendations:

- Individual farmers should contact legislators and government officials that have a say about farming methods with their opinions and recommendations

- Talking with individual agricultural producers about expressing their recommendations can be helpful, but it depends on the relationship

- Even though it is difficult and often avoided, it can be necessary to speak up to the media about farming because farmers understand agriculture better than most anybody, and the public likes to hear from farmers directly

- Everyone, including farmers, should be concerned about the planet and its capacity to feed people and survive into the future

- Two persons said visitors to farms with buildings and grounds where animals (or poultry) are raised should not be allowed to take photographs without permission from the owners; owners also should review the stories and pictures before they are released to the public

- Two other persons said not al-

lowing visitors or photographs raises suspicions that these producers have something to hide

- All the livestock producers are concerned about visitors contaminating their premises and animals (or poultry) with diseases and said the public should recognize and respect this concern

- Two persons who are organic producers welcome visitors and media inquiries and said other crop producers should welcome visitors but they understand why other livestock and poultry producers might feel differently

- One person thought "stewardship models" of farming should take priority over "business models" which he said dominate agriculture, so that farmland remains fertile even if the current farming operation doesn't succeed financially

- Four farmers said some media and consumers have formulated ideological conclusions about farming and seek only information that confirms their beliefs; these persons should not be "written off" even if they don't contribute to useful discussion about the future of agriculture; they need accurate information

- The perception of farmland ownership falling into the hands of a few is only partially correct because small acreage farmers are fast increasing; one person said land owners who wish to sell farmland should consider offering their land in smaller lots so the many small producers seeking land have a chance to purchase agricultural tracts

This small sample of agricultural producers feel that what Americans think about farmers and farming is important. The opinions of these farmers agree almost entirely with the findings of a research project investigating health literacy among rural people which three faculty of the Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health and I undertook three years ago.

Agriculture's public image is a big deal!

Dr. Rosmann can be contacted at: www.agbehavioralhealth.com.

Hearing

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Besides Nelson, PUC Commissioners Kristie Fiegen and Gary Hanson will hear comments from the public. NorthWestern Energy representatives will be available to address specific questions.

Nelson will open Thursday's meeting with introductory remarks, followed by NorthWestern's presentation. The opening segment should last about 30 minutes, at which time the floor will be opened for public questions and comments.

"This (Yankton meeting) won't have a court reporter," he said. "However, they will record it, and the recording will become part of the proceedings on the website. Folks can listen to it later."

Thursday's meeting is just one part of the long, complex process that goes into deciding a rate increase, Nelson said.

The PUC commissioners and staff are working through documentation provided by NorthWestern officials, he said. The PUC staff will negotiate with the company and the intervenors, who are part of the formal legal process.

Any unresolved issues can be brought before the commissioners, Nelson said. At an evidentiary hearing, the company presents its evidence and witnesses.

The PUC must issue its decision on NorthWestern's proposed rate increase within a year, Nelson said. After six months, the company can implement interim rates until the PUC issues a ruling.

"(The interim rates) can be anything up to what they have asked for, with the understanding if we ultimately grant them something less than what they are charging, the over-collected amount will be refunded," he said.

Under state statute, the rate must be "just and reasonable," Nelson said. The PUC takes into account a number of factors sur-

rounding a proposed rate increase, he said.

"It's an extremely complex issue," he said. "There could be thousands of numbers that our staff has to crunch to get through it all."

There are no time limits on the length of a rate increase or when a company can request another increase, Nelson said. NorthWestern last asked for a rate increase in 1981, he noted.

"Sometimes, one of the items that enters into the negotiations is the 'stay out' provision, where the company agrees it will not come in for a rate increase for 'X' amount of time," he said.

Those who cannot attend Thursday's meeting in Yankton can submit written comments, which is particularly encouraged for lengthy comments, Nelson said. Written correspondence becomes part of the public record.

The Yankton meeting won't be the first PUC public information meeting in southeast South Dakota, Nelson said. He last attended a NorthWestern natural gas hearing in Scotland, where the meeting was prompted by a public request.

"I remember it as being an incredibly positive experience. A lot of folks showed up. They explained their positions and were asking questions," he said.

"It was the perfect example of how government can interact with citizens, and we can listen to each other and do our jobs. Hopefully, we'll have the same kind of positive experience in Yankton."

For more information, visit the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission website at www.puc.sd.gov and click onto docket EL14-106 for the NorthWestern Energy electric rate increase request and related filings submitted to the commission. See also the PUC's electric rate increase requests information guide, accessible from the PUC homepage.

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'Go Fourth' Program Aims To Get South Dakota Youth Outdoors

PIERRE — Twelve thousand fourth graders in South Dakota schools will get a special taste of summer freedom through South Dakota Game, Fish, and Park's new "Go Fourth" program.

The "Go Fourth" program, presented in partnership with the South Dakota Department of Health, will distribute free entrance licenses for one day in any South Dakota state park to every fourth grade student in South Dakota. The passes allow entrance to any South Dakota state park to students and their families and include a free hour of kayak, canoe or paddleboat rental, where available.

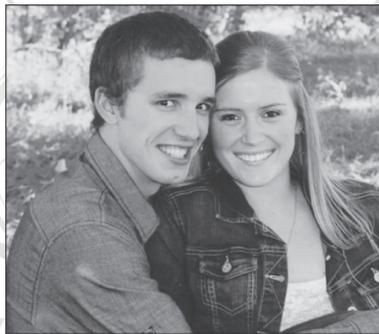
"The program aims to give every student exposure to local natural resources and a chance to start a lifetime of healthy habits," said state park director, Doug Hofer. "The program will showcase activities and opportunities available at state parks, as well as events and educational programs taking place."

The passes will be distributed at all public and private schools. Families can turn in the day-pass for a discount off of an annual pass. The entrance licenses are valid between the distribution date and Dec. 31, 2015.

"South Dakota's many state parks and recreation areas are great places for families to get out and get active," said Linda Ahrendt, chronic disease prevention and health promotion administrator for the Department of Health. "We're very pleased to be part of the 'Go Fourth' program and its effort to get kids outside and moving in our state parks."

Other "Go Fourth" partners include the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program in South Dakota, the American Heart Association in South Dakota and the South Dakota Parks and Recreation Association.

For more information, visit the GFP website/, call 605.773.3391 or email lynn.spomer@state.sd.us/.



Wieseler-Sathe

Ali Wieseler, daughter of Keith and Lois Wieseler, and Justin Sathe, son of Jay and Wendi Sathe, announce their engagement and upcoming marriage.

The bride-elect is a 2009 graduate of Yankton High School and a 2013 graduate of the University of South Dakota. She is currently employed as a registered nurse at the Yankton Medical Clinic.

The groom-elect is a 2008 graduate of Yankton High School and a 2009 graduate of Wyo Tech. He is currently employed at Kolberg-Pioneer in Yankton.

The couple is planning a June 20, 2015 wedding in Yankton.



Johnson-Christensen

William and Lora Johnson of Yankton, SD, are pleased to announce the engagement and upcoming marriage of their daughter Jaimie Leigh Johnson to Joseph Daniel Christensen, son of Dan Christensen of Yankton, SD, and Deanna Swenson of Rapid City, SD.

The bride-elect is a 2008 graduate of Yankton High School and is currently employed at Applied Engineering in Yankton.

The groom-elect is a 2004 graduate of Yankton High School and a 2005 graduate of Wyo Tech. He is currently employed at Christensen Radiator and Repair in Yankton and Applied Engineering.

The couple is planning a July, 2015 wedding in Yankton.



Rueb-VanHeerde

Megan Rueb and Tyler VanHeerde have announced their engagement and upcoming marriage.

Parents of the couple are Troy and Brenda Rueb of Yankton, SD, Cindy and Brett Sherrill of Baltic, SD, and Dean and Carolyn VanHeerde of Dell Rapids, SD.

The bride-elect graduated from the University of South Dakota with a degree in Health Sciences and will be attending the University of South Dakota this fall to obtain her doctorate in Occupational Therapy.

The groom-elect studied auto body at the Southeast Technical Institute and is currently employed as shop manager at Pierre's Body Shop in Sioux Falls.

The couple is planning a June 20, 2015 wedding in Sioux Falls, SD.