

THE SHHH CALIFORNIAN

California State Association Newsletter of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc.

THE AWAKENING MEDICAL COMMUNITY PROMOTING HEARING HEALTH

by Grace W. Tiessen

I have been a member of Kaiser Permanente (KP) for 45 years.

Oakland-based KP is America's largest nonprofit HMO. Formed in 1942 for Kaiser shipyard and steelworkers, it opened to the general public in 1945. KP serves

8.3 M members in 9 states and the District of Columbia. It encompasses Kaiser Foundation Health Plan Inc., Kaiser Foundation Hospitals and their subsidiaries, and the Permanente Medical Groups. **6.2 M members or one-fifth of the population of California belong to KP.** Na-

tionwide, KP includes approximately 142,000 technical, administrative and clerical employees and 12,000 physicians representing all specialties. In California, there are 28 KP hospitals, 8600 physicians and 101,600 employees.

Any changes made by KP, will ripple through and change medical/hearing health practices throughout the United States.

In 2000, Disability Rights Advocates brought a class-action lawsuit against KP on behalf of all its California members with disabilities, saying that their facilities and programs were inaccessible to disabled people.

KP agreed in April 2001 to revamp all its California health centers and policies to meet the needs of people with vision, **hearing**, cognitive, speech and mobility disabilities.

In 2001, an excellent Training Manual, *Listening Closely, A Better Way to Communicate with the Hard of Hearing*, was published by KP. SHHH members **Fred Smith, Ronda Bonati** and **Margaret Azcona** are acknowledged for their contributions to its development.

In 2002, KP put on a 3-day Conference in October 2002 in Pasadena, CA—the 25th Annual National Diversity Conference. Two members of SHHH, **Brenda Battat**, Director, Public Policy and State Development and **Mary Clark**, Orange County Chapter President gave a workshop, *“Say What? Listening Closely: Who are the Hard of Hearing?”*

In June 2003, working with Kaiser Permanente (KP) moved to a whole new level. **KP and SHHH will partner at the national level** to develop a nationwide training program, using Distance Learning technology, and a revised *Listening Closely to the Hard of Hearing Population*

training manual.

Gayle Tang and **Shari Samuels** were speakers at the Plenary Session during the 18th Annual International SHHH convention in Atlanta, GA. Gayle is Director, KP National Linguistic & Cultural Programs, and Shari is Program Manager, KP ADA Compliance.

Their talk focused on communications access to health

care and KP's efforts to include people with hearing loss. As an integrated health delivery system, KP is committed to providing "culturally competent care" to an increasingly diverse membership.

In November 2003, KP

held a daylong, nationwide, interactive videoconference for its clinicians and allied health professionals entitled *Culturally Competent Care for the Hard of Hearing Population*.

Two SHHH members participated as experts in the field--**Teresa Burke**, a member at large of the SHHH National Board of Trustees and **Mary Clark**, President of SHHH Orange County Chapter

This conference was groundbreaking because there were two hard of hearing SHHH members doing the orientation/awareness training, as experts on the subject of hearing loss. The audience learned the differences and similarities between the deaf community and the hard of hearing population; the concerns of hard of hearing patients with regard to access to health care; and communication strategies that could be used in various clinical and non-clinical settings.

A set of video tapes was made of the conference to add to the library of training opportunities with KP. **By using hard of hearing presenters, this conference was a first for health care education providers.**

In August 2005, Margaret Azcona and Grace Tiessen met with Nitasha Lal and Theresa Tang, KP ADA Compliance Officers, to talk about continuing efforts to make KP accessible to hard of hearing people.

What has KP done to give access to hard of hearing people and to promote hearing health?

SHHH-CA has received several **Kaiser Permanente Community Relations Grants** to help us publish the State newsletter, *The SHHH Californian*--\$5000 in 2002, \$5000 in 2003, \$10,000 in 2004 and \$5,000 in 2005. Educating mem-



Thank you, **Kaiser Permanente**, for your Community Relations Grant of \$5,000 in support our State newsletter. *The SHHH California*, Educating members about hearing loss through supporting our newsletter follows the **Kaiser Permanente Philosophy of preventive medicine through educa-**

THE AWAKENING EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY (cont.)

bers about hearing loss through supporting our newsletter follows the KP philosophy of preventive medicine through education.

KP is testing the hearing of 100% of newborns. Hard of hearing infants are followed up to see that timely intervention is made—hearing aids before 6 months, CIs later if necessary.

The KP Healthwise Handbook has been updated and is beginning to integrate hearing healthcare into overall healthcare.

As part of the Communications Access Solutions project, KP has purchased 400 Willams Sound Pocket Talkers. These assistive listening devices have been distributed to medical centers throughout Northern and Southern California. The staff in various departments, including Health Education, Member Services, and Emergency have been trained in their use.

Some KP Audiology reception desks stamp the waiting room number you are to go to on the registration form.

Many pharmacies now have electronic boards where names are put alphabetically when prescriptions are ready.

For those who have difficulty hearing on the telephone, appointments and prescription refills can be made online. Some doctors are giving out their email addresses so they can be contacted online.

At the reception desks, there are Hearing Health Check pull-off pads, asking if you or someone you know is experiencing hearing loss, with a list of 8 questions. If you answer "yes" to 3, you are asked to call Kaiser Audiology to have a complete hearing evaluation.

KP has contracted with HEARx (25 outlets in Southern California, none in Northern CA) to sell hearing aids. Hearing aid purchasers (KP members receive 10% off) receive a handbook and three one-hour lectures on hearing aid use/aural rehabilitation. HEARx puts large ads in newspapers and signboards at KP reception desks listing their addresses, and saying if you have trouble hearing, see KP audiology and get a complete hearing evaluation.

What more can Kaiser Permanente do to give HOH people communications access and to promote Hearing Health?

Every member should have a hearing test as part of their baseline medical record. Because of the California Newborn Hearing Screening Program, most infants will begin to enter the system with a hearing test in their medical records.

Overcome architectural barriers by installing audio loops. Looping is an "install and forget" system of giving communications access to hard of hearing people. **In all new and extensively remodeled buildings, wherever there is a public address system, a loop should be permanently installed.** When there is a loop, all a hard of

hearing person has to do to be able to hear, is click on the T-switches on their hearing aids. The UK has a law requiring any organization that provides information to provide a loop system. See www.hearingloop.org and www.centrumssound.com.

In all new and extensively remodeled buildings, acoustics should be considered, following the standards of the Access Board, www.access-board.gov, and the Acoustical Society of America, www.asa.aip.org

Educate the professionals who work with people who have hearing loss -- physicians, nurses, staff--in how to communicate with hard of hearing people. **Require KP physicians and technical, administrative and clerical employees to watch the November 2003 video entitled *Culturally Competent Care for the Hard of Hearing Population*. This video featured two SHHH members as experts in the field and provides communication tools for health care providers to use when dealing with hard of hearing clients.**

Hard of hearing people (also Spanish speakers) need all instructional/educational videos to be shown captioned at all times. Without captioning they have little or no communications access.

Give hard of hearing people information so that they can help themselves. Give to each person going through the KP Audiology Department, an information sheet, telling about hearing loss and support groups like SHHH/ CIAI and recommend that they go to several meetings of SHHH. Hand out addresses of hearing loss web sites, such as www.shhhca.org, www.hearingloss.org, www.drf.org, www.oraldeafed.org, etc.

Continue updating the KP Hearing Healthwise handbook. Educating members about hearing loss follows the KP philosophy of preventive medicine through education.

Add a section on hearing health to the Living Healthwise chapter in the Hearing Health handbook.

Warn members about the dangers to their hearing from ototoxic drugs.

Warn members about the dangers to their hearing from noise--iPods, loud music, noisy machinery. Educate members about wearing hearing protection, such as earplugs or earmuffs.

Tell parents of HOH infants to begin intervention immediately. Do not wait 6 months or a year. Infants as young as one month can be fitted with hearing aids.

Loss of hearing is a serious disability, a medical condition that is associated with physical, emotional, mental and social well-being. Depression, anxiety, exhaustion, high blood pressure, emotional instability, phobias, withdrawal, isolation, lessened health status and lessened self-esteem have all been linked to uncorrected hearing loss.

Under checkups, add 'hearing should be checked every 5 years'. Hard of hearing people often don't realize they are hard of hearing. List how often hearing should be checked from birth throughout one's lifetime.

