

Loud and Clear

Whether it's one of Mozart's finest piano concertos, an intimate conversation with a loved one or the poetry of birdsong, humans connect with some of life's most profound experiences through their sense of hearing. But for many individuals, however, the volume and clarity of their hearing dull over time. Some lose this vital sense entirely, figuring they have no viable option to reclaim it.

Approximately 37.5 million Americans ages 18 and older—15 percent of U.S. adults—report some trouble hearing, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDOC). The condition tends to worsen with age, but Haley McDonald, Au.D., says the technology used to treat hearing loss has made significant strides in recent years, now offering patients the potential to significantly improve their quality of life and enjoy everyday activities once again.

Dr. McDonald recently joined the staff of Ear Nose Throat & Facial Plastic Surgery Specialists P.C., a practice founded by Joshua E. Goldberg, D.O., FACOS, that has its own audiology practice, Ear & Hearing Specialists Inc. While Dr. McDonald enjoyed working with patients of all ages at her externship and is trained in evaluating pediatric patients for auditory processing disorder, she will be focusing on hearing-aid evaluations and fittings at Ear & Hearing Specialists Inc.

"Everyone has a different perception of what their hearing is supposed to be," she says. "Many people haven't been hearing normally for years, so when they're finally fitted with a hearing aid that's right for them, they're blown away."

Approximately 28.8 million U.S. adults could benefit from using hearing aids, according to NIDOC, but Dr. McDonald suggests a lingering stigma surrounding these devices may be preventing some of them from getting the help they need. The stigma is unjustified, she says, because today's hearing aids are more inconspicuous, and more effective, than ever before.

"Some of these devices even fit completely inside the ear, so they're

practically invisible," she says. "These IIC (invisible-in-the-canal) hearing aids aren't right for everyone, but even the ones that fit behind the ear are much smaller and more discreet; you can barely see them, if that's something you're concerned about."

The stakes are high, according to Dr. McDonald, as hearing loss can impair multiple aspects of an individual's life, including cognitive function. One study from Johns Hopkins University suggests that people over the age of 65 who have hearing loss have a higher incidence of developing dementia. Another common side effect of hearing loss: social isolation. Because of their diminished hearing, people may stop going to the theater, playing mahjong with friends or participating in other activities they used to enjoy.

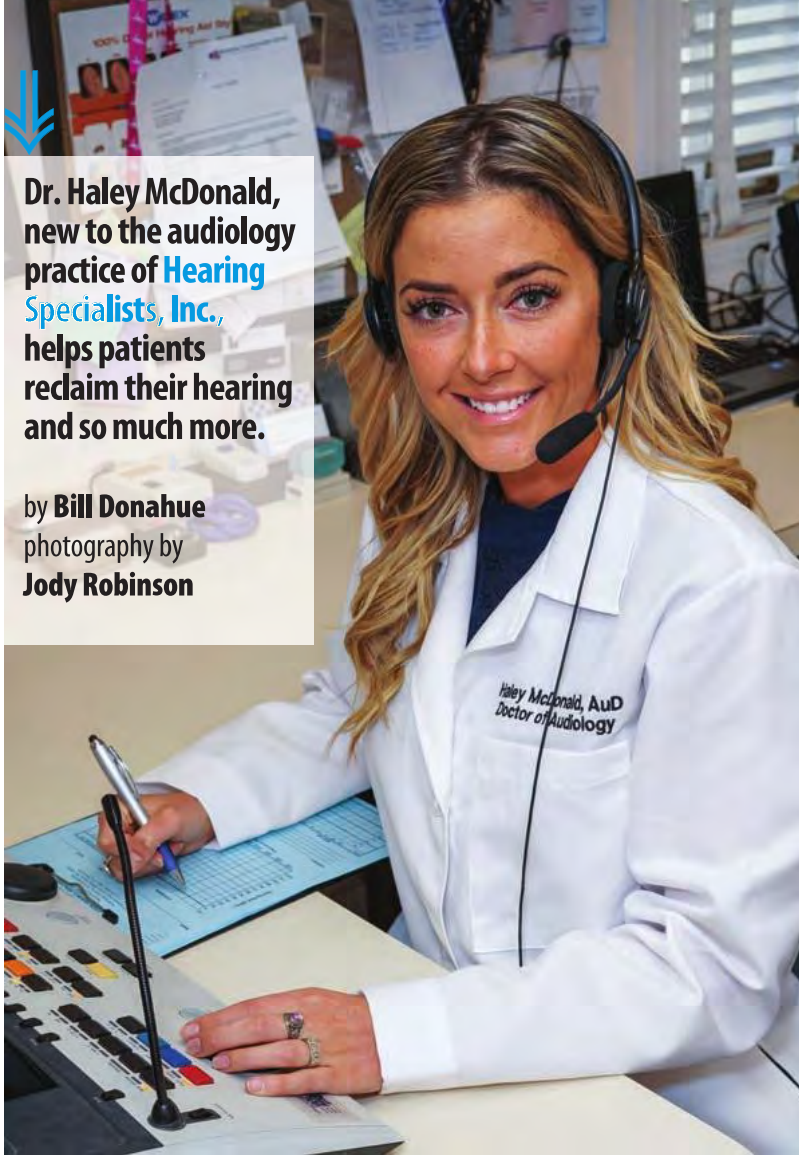
Also, Dr. McDonald says one individual's hearing loss can affect many.

"People with hearing loss often think the condition affects them and them alone, but their spouse and other family members suffer, too," she adds. "A wife might feel as if she's being ignored because her husband doesn't respond to her and the TV is always blasting. You hear stories from spouses who say they feel like they can't communicate with their loved one anymore. It takes a deep emotional toll."

Dr. McDonald originally thought she would focus on a career in speech pathology, but she "fell in love with audiology" while earning her undergraduate degree in

Dr. Haley McDonald, new to the audiology practice of Hearing Specialists, Inc., helps patients reclaim their hearing and so much more.

by Bill Donahue
photography by
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communication sciences and disorders from Pennsylvania State University. She was drawn to the idea of using her clinical skills to change patients' lives quickly—often within a month.

After her time at Penn State, Dr. McDonald went on to graduate with honors from Salus University's Osborne College of Audiology. She completed her clinical externship at Audiology Partners LLC in Marlton, N.J., where she strengthened her foundation for core clinical procedures and gained invaluable experience and proficiency with all of the so-called "Big Six" hearing-aid manufacturers.

Her best advice to individuals with significant hearing loss: Even if you think you're not quite ready for a hearing aid, meet with a qualified audiologist who can explain all of your options and illustrate how a hearing aid may be able to help.

"I've seen people cry in my office because of how well they hear after being fit with a hearing aid," she says. "You have people who didn't fully understand everything other people were saying to them, and then all of a sudden they can hear a great someone effect or



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