

October 11th, 2023

Hearing Care Professionals Technical Review Committee
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Attn: Ron Briel, Credentialing Review
PO Box 94986
Lincoln, NE 68509-4986
Sent via e-mail

To whom it may concern,

My name is Samuel Gillespie and I am an audiologist practicing in Omaha, NE. I am writing to you in response to the Credentialing Review (407) for Hearing Care Professionals. I wanted to share some important insights and opposition to expansion of scope for Hearing Instrument Specialists, specifically regarding tinnitus and the involvement of non-medical professionals in its treatment. I believe it is crucial to provide accurate information and ensure the well-being of Nebraskans dealing with this condition.

Tinnitus is the perception of sound(s) in the ears without any external source. It can be a distressing and debilitating condition for many individuals, impacting their quality of life and overall well-being. Given its complex nature, it is vital to approach tinnitus treatment with caution and expertise.

While non-medical professionals, including Hearing Instrument Specialists, may have good intentions and a desire to assist, it is important to recognize the limitations and potential risks associated with their involvement. Tinnitus is a multifaceted condition that requires a comprehensive understanding of its underlying causes, mechanisms, and appropriate treatment/management approaches.

Medical professionals, such as audiologists and otolaryngologists possess the necessary knowledge, training, and expertise to accurately diagnose and treat tinnitus. They have access to the latest research, diagnostic tools, and evidence-based therapies that have been proven effective in managing tinnitus symptoms. Additional medical professionals, including behavioral therapists, can also assist in helping patients manage the psychological and emotional impact of tinnitus.

Working with non-medical professionals in the context of tinnitus treatment can potentially lead to ineffective or even harmful outcomes. Tinnitus can have various underlying causes, ranging from exposure to loud noises, middle ear pathology (Eustachian tube dysfunction, glomus tumor, ear infection), inner ear pathology, (acoustic neuroma, Meniere's disease) pharmacological, (over 200 medications list tinnitus as a potential side effect) to other medical conditions, including thyroid disorder, diabetes and autoimmune disorders. Only professionals with advanced degrees and training can properly evaluate and diagnose the root cause of tinnitus and provide appropriate treatment options tailored to individual needs.

Last but certainly not least, the psychological effect of tinnitus must be well understood by professionals who include tinnitus testing/management in their scope of practice. Audiologists,

as well as other professionals that specialize in tinnitus, are trained in college and doctoral level coursework to understand the emotional impact that tinnitus can cause, (psychology, counseling, aural rehabilitation, psychoacoustics, anatomy of the auditory system).

I understand the desire to explore non-medical professional advice/assistance in search of relief from tinnitus, but it is crucial to prioritize evidence-based medical interventions. Seeking guidance from qualified professionals ensures access to accurate diagnosis, personalized treatment plans, and ongoing support throughout the journey of managing tinnitus.

Professionals with extensive training and experience in the anatomy, physiology and aural rehabilitation process of the auditory system (including audiologists and otolaryngologists) can provide the expertise and guidance necessary to navigate this condition effectively and improve quality of life.

The health and well-being of Nebraskans should always be the top priority. By seeking appropriate medical care, we can ensure the most effective and safe management of tinnitus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Gillespie', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Samuel A. Gillespie, Au.D. CCC-A, F-AAA