

Hearing loss affects life connections

BY EMILY HEDGES – CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jane Hutar doesn't take hearing for granted. With her new hearing aids from hi HealthInnovations, the 74-year-old is reminded just how sweet the simplest sound can be, like your name across a crowded room.

"I noticed when I was in a large group of people, I couldn't hear or understand one word. That went on for quite a while," said Hutar.

She recalls at one gathering, she mentioned to the woman standing next to her that she couldn't hear. The woman responded that she too was thinking of getting hearing aids.

"I thought that's what I should do," she said. "People expect you to hear what they have said, and it's so difficult when you don't hear at all."

Hutar's daughter, who works for UnitedHealthcare, told her about hi HealthInnovations. She went to the clinic in Eden Prairie and had her hearing tested at no charge.

According to Dr. Lisa Tseng, M.D.,

CEO, because hi HealthInnovations is part of UnitedHealth Group they can offer higher quality at a lower cost. She also points to the support infrastructure as unique in the industry.

"The affordability of our hearing aids and the amount of customer support we provide set us apart," she said. "We have free one-on-one phone support from product specialists, online user videos, daily new user seminars hosted by audiologists, and in-person support in many cities nationwide."

For Hutar, there is no downside to her new hearing aids.

"I love them. They don't show even with my short hair. I don't think it would bother me even if they did show," she said. "It's nice to know what everyone is talking about and hear when someone calls your name. It gives you more of a feeling of being included when you can hear everything."

According to Dr. Tseng, seniors sometimes don't realize that hearing loss can impact our closest relationships.

"It's really hard to be intimate and

engaged when you feel the other person isn't hearing you. It's difficult enough sharing feelings without having to repeat yourself," she said.

Dr. Tseng points out that the misunderstandings that occur as a result of hearing loss is another important reason for seniors to seek help.

"Many people with hearing loss have a harder time distinguishing consonants, so they tend to have difficulty correctly recognizing words. Two people can be having a conversation and have two different understandings of what went on. It really can be quite challenging," she said.

Studies show that untreated hearing loss can affect a person's ability to stay connected to friends and family, contributing to social isolation, depression and lower income. While 90 percent of people with hearing loss can benefit from hearing aids, fewer than 20 percent currently use them, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The high cost of most hearing aids is one of the reasons many seniors choose not to seek help.

"It is so important to treat hearing loss. It's not something you have to live with," said Dr. Tseng.

Hutar thinks that some seniors might hesitate because they've heard they are difficult to set, or they won't actually use them, or they will be self-conscious.

"I suggest going in as soon as you can. You don't realize how much you miss until you get your hearing aids. Don't wait a year or longer like I did. You're just losing out."

hi HealthInnovations also recently launched a new program to make hearing aids more affordable for U.S. veterans and their spouses. Hearing loss is a growing health concern for some veterans, in part because of their history of noise exposure during service. Hearing loss is the second most common health condition among veterans, affecting more than 670,000 members of the armed forces nationwide, according to The Hearing Journal.

For more information on the veteran discount program and hearing tests, call 1-855-523-9355 or go to www.hihealthinnovations.com.