



Securing the Future of Audiology

Dustin Richards

Hometown: Vilonia, AR

Current School: 2nd-year AuD student, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR

Future Plans: At this point, it is difficult to tell, but I would say that the ultimate goal is private practice. Regardless of the setting, I want to ensure that no knowledge accumulated over my academic tenure is wasted. I will be an activist for the field of audiology.

Favorite Sports Teams: Los Angeles Lakers, Chicago Cubs, Green Bay Packers, and the Arkansas Razorbacks

Quote to Live by: "If a great thing can be done, it can be done easily, but this ease is like the ease of a tree blossoming after long years of gathering strength."
—John Ruskin

Audiology students know too well the sheer amount of straining it takes to commit knowledge and procedures to memory in the clinic and classroom. It is important to have a vast base of knowledge at your disposal upon entering the field as a professional. Reasoning cannot occur without such knowledge. This knowledge should not be seen as a barrier standing in the way of your desired outcome (hopefully an "A"), rather it should be seen as an opportunity to further extend your professional ability. All of this is important, but I believe that professionals and students alike are neglecting a deeper issue.

When was the last time (or even the first time) that you put a lot of thought into the future and well-being of the field? Dr. Kris English, past president of the American Academy of Audiology, recently noted a particular instance where thousands of audiologists had access to a tool that allowed for an already written letter to be sent to Congress protesting medical reimbursement cuts with just one click of the mouse. Out of thousands of audiologists, only one percent put forth what amounts to roughly 15 seconds to use the tool. If you happen to be an avid supporter of reimbursement cuts, the point still remains. This same scenario has occurred on less divided issues, such as direct patient access. It makes little sense to devote so many hours, resources, and our non-gray hairs to becoming experts on hearing, and yet show apathy toward the longevity of the field itself. The hard-of-hearing population continues to grow, but the ratio of the treated to those who remain untreated seems to remain stagnant. The best way to ensure that this changes is to secure the future of audiology, because helping those who remain untreated is what we have committed our livelihoods to. It is what we have worked so hard to be good at.

At the conclusion of our studies, we will have accumulated an enormous amount of knowledge on the function and care of hearing. That is what will make us students hearing experts. If apathy continues to prevail, though, current audiology students may live to see the day where nonhearing health-care professionals manage hearing health care. I call to all of my fellow students to become advocates of audiology before even entering the profession. If you are not made aware of current professional issues in the classroom, take the initiative to do it on your own, for the sake of yourself—and more importantly—for those people we are being trained to help. Eventually, we will have the knowledge and skills to assist the hard of hearing. Take the steps to ensure that our ability to provide such service is never taken away. 🎧