



July 15, 2015

Hearing Aid Specialists – Tinnitus FAQ

The Health Licensing Office (HLO) has received several inquiries regarding tinnitus and hearing aid specialists “treating” the condition with the new technology available in hearing aids with masking functions. The HLO has consulted with the Advisory Council on Hearing Aids and the Oregon Department of Justice.

1) What is tinnitus?

Answer: Tinnitus is a sound no one else can hear, usually subjective, although in rare cases where it is caused by an abnormality in a vein or artery, can be heard with a stethoscope. The causes of tinnitus can be varied, and can include:

- A tumor on the auditory nerve
- Ear-damaging drugs
- Meniere’s disease
- Noise exposure
- Jaw misalignment
- Middle- or inner-ear infections
- Wax on the eardrum
- Diseases of the heart and blood vessels
- Hormonal changes
- Thyroid abnormalities

Treatment for tinnitus will vary depending on the cause, and may include acoustic/sound therapy, masking of the sound, adjustments to outside sound levels via a hearing aid, medications, biofeedback, acoustical neural stimulation, cochlear implants and cognitive behavioral therapy, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) and the Mayo Clinic.

2) Are the diagnosis and treatment of tinnitus within the scope of practice of a hearing aid specialist?

Answer: No. ORS 694.015(2)’s definition of “dealing in hearing aids” does not include the diagnosis and treatment an underlying disease or defect that interferes with human hearing such as tinnitus. Instead, “dealing in hearing aids” means the measuring of a person’s hearing capability when evaluating and measuring their hearing range so that they can be fitted with a hearing aid or to have their hearing aid adapted for a different range or power of hearing.

3) May hearing aid specialists advertise that they can treat tinnitus?

Answer: No. Since the diagnosis and treatment of tinnitus are not within a hearing aid specialist’s scope of practice, it is not permissible to advertise that they can treat the condition.

4) What happens if the Health Licensing Office receives a complaint that a hearing aid specialist is unlawfully or negligently practicing audiology or medicine?

Answer: HLO and the Advisory Council on Hearing Aids do not regulate the practice of audiology or medicine. HLO will refer the complaint to the Oregon Medical Board, Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology, or other appropriate health professional regulatory board. A hearing aid specialist may be subject to investigation and possible sanctions if found to be providing services that are not within their scope of practice.