

# Have it Your Way

By Pat Fournier BC-HIS

The hearing industry is changing! Better hearing aids and lower prices have arrived and it's all because of competition. Competition is good. The Hearing Place is competitive with everyone (when you compare apples to apples). We belong to the Ear-Q buying group so we can offer discount pricing, which is why we are able to compete with big box stores and the internet. But it's our "old fashioned care" that really makes us stand out from the rest. Making your hearing aids perform to their maximum and keeping them performing that way is what really delivers value. This is how we built our practice.

Humana and AARP now offer hearing aid benefits. Because hearing aids are medical devices, you need to buy them from licensed professionals. Both groups have contracted with national internet marketing firms to offer hearing aids at a discount.

This is how it works. Humana or AARP directs you to a national marketing company where a telemarketer attempts to sign you up as a "member" for about \$100.



If successful, they contact a local provider for testing and fitting of the hearing aids. Your appointments must be handled by the telemarketer and your hearing aid purchase is *paid directly to that out of state marketing firm*. The only money you pay to your local provider is \$49 to \$135 for the exam. Because of Humana and AARP name recognition, and the telemarketer's promise of a much better price through their membership, people sign up.

The key to these firms' low entry price is "unbundling". Rather than the standard free service on the hearing aids for the life of the instrument, you receive 2 or 3 follow up visits after which you pay (national average) \$35 to \$75 plus parts for each successive visit. So to compete with these national firms, in addition to our "old fashioned care" pricing we are offering a "modern service package" unbundled pricing. Our service charges are far lower than those national averages. However with the "modern service package", we will have to charge for services.



On one marketing firm's website I found this misleading statement: "**the industry justified hefty, padded prices for hearing aids by bundling "lifetime visits" with the purchase. In reality, most people only need to see an audiologist a few times.**" Yes, unbundling can save you money *but only if you can see well, have good dexterity and are tech savvy.*

In reality, the industry evolved free lifetime visits because hearing aids live in a hostile environment, the human ear. Hearing aids need servicing. This is why we have service centers and a competent staff ready to help. We train patients to come in regularly with free batteries coupons so that we can check to see if the aids are up to specs. Most people don't know if they are. It's our job to make sure. Often patients are surprised to find out their aids aren't working as well as they should.

**Have it your way**, either pricing structure is fine with us. Let's talk and discover which way delivers the best value for you.