

Hearing center is here

The leading edge of the “baby boomers,” those born in 1945, is now reaching 65 years of age. Many of those in the population bulge are noticing that along with the aches and pains of the aging process are losses in acuity of eyesight and hearing.

To address the growing hearing concerns of the aging baby boomers, St. Luke Community Healthcare is establishing a hearing center at the Ronan hospital.

The new hearing clinic will offer professional, full-service diagnostic testing – a first for the Mission Valley. Prior to this, patients had to travel to Missoula or Kalispell to have their hearing tested by a certified audiologist.

Eve Tolbert, a certified audiologist with 22 years experience, will be operating the new clinic. She says, “My goal is to improve an individual's ability to communicate by meeting their specific hearing needs.” However, Tolbert notes that, “Hearing problems aren’t relegated to the elderly.” Adding, “I see people from birth to 100 years old.”



Tolbert has worked at St. Luke for four years as an audiologist and speech therapist. She earned her degree in audiology and speech therapy from the University of Montana.

One thing the St. Luke audiologist has noticed in recent years is that her clients are younger than they used to be. “People aren’t waiting so long (to have their hearing tested),” she says.

According to Tolbert, symptoms of hearing loss can include increased ringing in the ears, dizziness or balance issues, or asking others to repeat themselves more often. She also says that those with a family history of hearing loss or constant exposure to loud noise may want to consider a hearing exam.

A hearing exam includes an external inspection of the ear for abnormalities, a “pure-tone” test in a sound booth and speech discrimination tests. The goal, says Tolbert, “is to determine the type and severity of hearing loss, and – if you’re a hearing-aid candidate – to determine what your specific hearing needs are.”

Tolbert suggests that people “who want a baseline hearing test, or know that they have hearing loss and are ready to do something about it” can call the hearing center for an appointment, or “ask their doctor for a referral.”

Should an exam determine that a patient is a candidate for a hearing aid, the St. Luke Hearing Center will have a variety of brands available to choose from ranging in price from \$900 to \$3,000 apiece. Tolbert says that each device comes with a trial period and return policy. She goes on to say that although insurance companies and Medicare generally won’t pick up the tab for hearing aids, they will often pay for hearing tests.

The clinic will be open four days a week by appointment. Tolbert also hopes to offer after-hours and Saturday appointments “if the community supports it.”

Appointments can be scheduled by phoning 528-5234.

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