Nine Years Old

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This is a pep talk about our national education efforts. This is a true story about a 9-year-old girl—call her Janie.

Janie was referred to me because the school system hearing screening program detected some "difficulties" at 4 kHz. Janie's history information was unremarkable. There was no family history of hearing loss, no tinnitus, no dizziness and only a few ear infections when she was much younger.

Figure 1 shows Janie's audiogram with loss of hearing at

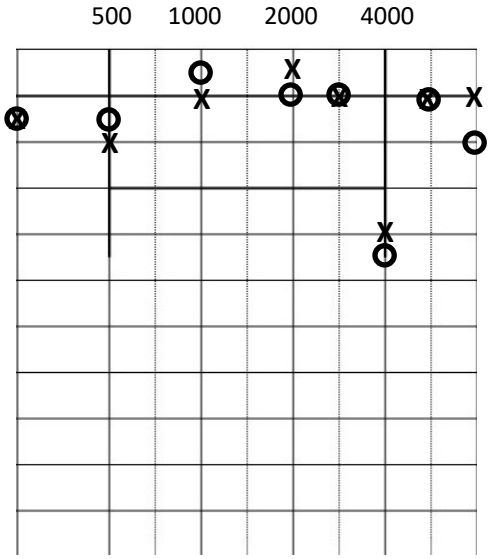

Figure 1. Janie's audiogram

4 kHz. There are no middle ear problems.

Otoacoustic emissions are displayed in Figure 2. Distortion product emissions were present f2 frequencies of 3 kHz and lower, but not at 3.5 or 4 kHz in either ear.

My childhood case history form does not ask about noise exposure and I had not even considered the possibility of over-exposure to noise. However, the following is an excerpt from the conversation I had with Janie and her mother following her evaluation:

Me to Parent: "I'm assuming that there is no noise exposure, such as from chain saws, firecrackers, tractors, guns or other such things."

Parent: "Oh...well, she shoots some with her father and brother, but not very often—once a week at the most. She'd shoot more if she could." (Janie is now shaking her head in agreement.)

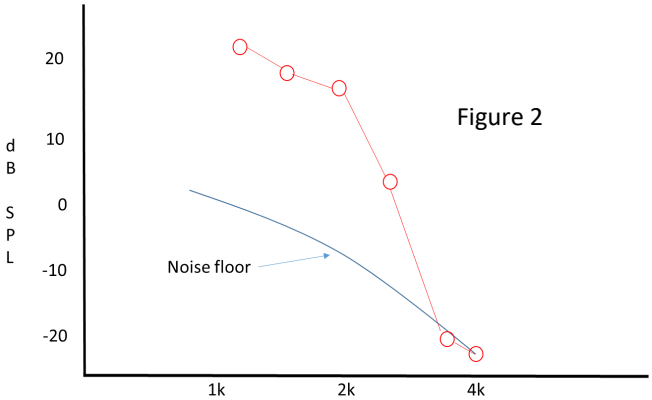

Figure 2

Me to Janie: "What kind of gun do you shoot?"

Janie: "I don't know—short ones like this." (She spreads her hands about 12 inches apart."

Parent: "A pistol."

Janie: "… and long ones. Some you have to pull back the hammer like this; some you just have to pull the trigger."

Me to Parent: "Firearm noise can certainly affect hearing. You've had the experience of shooting a gun and your ears ringing afterwards." (Janie, with widened eyes, is now enthusiastically shaking her head in agreement.)

One should not make assumptions about who may, and who may not, be overexposed to noise. Whether or not Janie's hearing loss is from firearm noise, she needs to change her ways and, at a minimum, start using hearing protection devices. Absent some future cure, the hearing loss she has now will always be with her, giving her a head start toward significant auditory difficulties.

Even though our message about noise and hearing may be simple, we should not be deterred from carrying that message to parents, sons, daughters, teachers and the media.

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