

“I Grew Up on the Other Side of the Test Booth”

An Audiologist’s Story

By Torryn P. Brazell

In the last issue of *Audiology Today*, we heard from Sheri Gostomelsky, AuD, about why she chose to become ABA board certified in audiology. In this issue, we will hear from Stephanie Sjoblad, AuD, who is an audiology faculty member at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and the clinic director for the UNC Hearing and Communication Center, a community-based hearing center.

Dr. Sjoblad shared her story about becoming an audiologist, why she became board certified, and why she enjoys both her work at the center and her work as an audiology faculty member.

As one of three children in her family born with a hearing loss, Dr. Sjoblad shared a very personal reason for becoming an audiologist.

“I grew up on the other side of the test booth,” she said. “My loss was progressive, and my hearing declined over the years. I began to wear a hearing aid at the age of six and eventually lost all of my hearing, but I now enjoy the benefits of bimodal hearing, having gotten a cochlear implant four years ago.”

She explained that she had not considered a career in audiology until her senior year in college, when she was asked to complete an honors thesis about the status of hearing health care in the United States.

“Working on the thesis, I became very interested in contributing my knowledge and experience,” she explained, “and I was hopeful I could make a difference for others with hearing loss. But, it took a long time to find someone that believed that someone with a profound hearing loss could be an audiologist.”

“That day came in 1994, when I met Dr. Jackson Roush at UNC-CH,” she continued. “He was the first person who believed someone with hearing loss could bring a unique perspective to the profession.”



Dr. Stephanie Sjoblad, Board Certified in Audiology.

Dr. Sjoblad went on to earn her master’s degree at UNC-CH and completed her clinical fellowship. In 2000, she earned her AuD through the Distance Education Program at the University of Florida.

Her work for the UNC-CH Center allows her to serve patients from school-age children to senior citizens. “We provide hearing testing, hearing aid selection, hearing aid fitting, audiological rehabilitation, hearing conservation assessments, hearing screenings, and more,” Dr. Sjoblad continued. “I enjoy working with patients, as I have first-hand experience with what life is like with hearing loss, and I also love that the academic environment enables me to be a lifelong learner.”

“Our community-based clinic is a training clinic for the doctoral students in audiology at UNC-CH, and it also provides a wonderful opportunity for students to see how a clinic runs, as the clinic functions like a private practice,” she explained. “As a university faculty member, I enjoy the opportunity to contribute to the education of future audiologists.”

That sense of community and collaboration with other audiologists also became one of the compelling reasons that Dr. Sjoblad earned her board certification in 2009.

“I wanted to earn ABA certification because it is created by audiologists and for audiologists,” she shared. “It is also a rigorous certification with double the number of continuing education hours of the other credentialing

organization and requires documentation of knowledge via assessments. I have never been one to do the bare minimum at anything, and I appreciate excellence. I want to encourage this in the students in my tutelage.”

Dr. Sjoblad and the UNC-CH are highly dedicated to ensuring that students have sufficient training and coursework to become licensed anywhere they wanted to practice.

“Our students always find jobs easily upon graduation. We hold accreditation with CAA and now are ACAE accredited. Over the years, we have found it more difficult to find supervisors that are maintaining their ASHA CCCs and now give students the option to work with a preceptor who is ABA certified,” she explained. “One of the challenges that must be met is for state licensing not to be tied to old credentials. I would love to see all AuD programs become ACAE accredited and put more focus on ABA certification for audiologists.

“I’m hopeful the day will come that audiology will be recognized as an autonomous profession, and I hope that everyone will aspire to be ABA certified,” she continued. “We must continue to educate both students and professionals in the field until we accomplish that goal.”

However, Dr. Sjoblad feels that licensing—while necessary—is the minimal standard required to provide a service or lay claim to a certain expertise, and she is uncertain whether all states have kept up with the changes in the AuD profession. “Licensing will always be needed—states license everyone from a plumber to a physician,” she said. “However, I would like to see state licensing boards all reviewing their laws to see if it’s time to up the ante and consider a more rigorous requirement to practice.

“Minimum standards may no longer be sufficient. However, a credential or board certification with required continuing education and documentation via testing suggests one is setting the bar higher. I am proud to tell my patients why I am board certified.”

The entire team of audiologists at the UNC-CH Hearing and Communication Center are ABA certified, and, according to Dr. Sjoblad, ABA certification is now a requirement for anyone hired for supervision of patients at the center. Her experience as an educator, practitioner, and a person with a hearing loss has combined to make Sjoblad a proponent of valuing the services of audiologists over the products they dispense. 📍

Torryn P. Brazell, MS, CAE, is the managing director for the American Board of Audiology.



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