

The accidental audiologist

BY MUHAMMED AYAS

In this article we hear from Muhammed Ayas, an “accidental” audiologist applying his transferable skills as a clinician, academic, and researcher through trying and testing innovative approaches in audiology to better serve the community.

My audiology journey began 22 years ago when I started as a student. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work in various capacities such as a clinician, academic, researcher, and administrator. When I reflect on my journey, I realise that becoming an audiologist was not something I had planned, and I consider myself an accidental audiologist. My initial aspiration was to become a physiotherapist due to my passion for sports. However, the allure of audiology was too strong to ignore, and I was fascinated by the potential impact this noble profession could have on the community. Like any student, I faced numerous challenges during my academic journey, but I persevered. Today, I am committed to being a good human in all that I do, and I am passionate about the positive impact audiology can have on people's lives.

Development choices

I was lucky to have started my career in a well-established teaching and clinical facility as a clinician and lecturer. This is where I had the opportunity to train several young budding audiology professionals. In order to advance my expertise, I took the courage to enrol in a PhD programme in audiology and eventually completed it. This experience helped me to discipline myself and become a more effective academic, and I was able to impart these skills to numerous audiology professionals.

After honing my skills in a teaching university, I accepted a new challenge to establish an audiology department in a newly built teaching hospital in the Middle East. Building a robust department from scratch taught me that there are numerous factors at play beyond audiology skills that are necessary to establish and run a dedicated unit. Through this experience, I learned how to collaborate with multiple teams and oversee the operational and financial needs of the unit.

As a lifelong learner, I pursued an AuD (Doctor of Audiology) to gain further insights into clinical management for hearing and balance and took on the lead to establish professional programmes for practising

audiologists, including a diploma in vestibular sciences. As a sports enthusiast, I enjoy seeking out new challenges. It was at this point that Cambridge came calling and I couldn't say no. I transitioned myself to NHS trust in Cambridge as a clinical audiologist and researcher.

Transferable skills

As an audiologist with international training and experience, I believe that we have a unique ability to adapt and be patient in challenging environments. I have been able to leverage this ability to wear multiple hats, including that of a clinician, academic and researcher, trying and testing innovative approaches in audiology to better serve the community.

I have also learned that networking and communication are essential skills that we must master as audiologists. We are trained to empathise with patients and coax them to do things that may not come naturally to them. I have found that these key skills have helped me to establish various course programmes in the university and liaise with multiple teams to drive hospital-wide projects. As we move into an era that is increasingly pro-artificial intelligence (AI), it is essential to stay up to date with data analytics and technical skills. By aligning our problem-solving skills with these traits, we can create an ideal profile for future transformation agents and clinical administrators.

Current role and looking to the future

In my current position as part of the hearing implant team at Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH), I specialise in cochlear implants and vestibular sciences, providing clinical services to the community. However, I believe that as clinicians, we should never rest on our laurels and must continue to uplift the profession through continuous learning and clinical research.

To achieve success in clinical research, I highly recommend honing time-management skills and dedicating consistent time to pursuing your passion. A useful tip is to actively engage and connect with like-

minded research professionals to foster knowledge exchange and share innovative research ideas. Also, take advantage of conferences, which serve as good platforms for discussing clinical experience and advancements in audiology translational research. Additionally, consider establishing connections with academic institutions for opportunities to deliver lectures.

As audiologists, we are not solely clinicians but also researchers, constantly striving to find solutions for our patients through critical and analytical thinking during clinical sessions. I look forward to developing objective measurements to improve the outcomes of cochlear implants for both children and adults, particularly in the area of electrophysiological measurements using speech sounds in CI users.

Advice for audiologists

As an integral member of the multidisciplinary team in the health sector, audiologists have a unique position. However, I believe that audiology as a profession lacks the recognition it deserves compared to other allied health professionals and scientists. To increase the presence of audiology, my advice to fellow audiologists is to constantly upskill themselves in various new and evolving areas of the profession. For example, they could specialise in vestibular sciences, hearing and public health policy making, or teaching and higher education. Furthermore, it is important to be a lifelong learner and continuously enhance your skills. As audiology is still a relatively young profession, it requires more professionals and work in the future.

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