

Going beyond patient care: discovering alternative roles in audiology

BY HUSMITA RATANJEE-VANMALI

In this article we hear about Husmita Ratanjee-Vanmali's journey from clinical practice to implementing global strategies for clinical practice, education, and innovation across South Africa, Canada and Denmark.

In the constantly evolving dynamic global sector, have you ever considered what roles in audiology exist where you can place audiology at the centre of everything you do, albeit sometimes your role does not place you in front of a patient?

I was born and spent my formative years in South Africa, where I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in audiology at the University of Cape Town, master's degree in audiology at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and my PhD from the University of Pretoria. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in three countries of varying backgrounds and healthcare landscapes: South Africa, Canada and Denmark.

I started my career working in a remote clinic in South Africa and the daunting task of managing this department at a young age was challenging, though refreshing knowing I was stepping out of my comfort zone. Very early in my career, I understood that I was a purpose-driven individual and wanted to be a part of impacting the audiology profession in any small or large way. Being curious in nature and having parents who encouraged us to think 'the world is your oyster' motivated me to want to explore and experience the world beyond the borders of South Africa.

In 2010, I was offered my first international position with Oticon HQ in Denmark (a part of Demant), as an international product and technology trainer. This placement allowed me to acquire skills including face-to-face classroom training, local and global presentations, and notably online learning,



Associate Professor Ariane Laplante-Lévesque (Linköping University, Sweden), Husmita Ratanjee-Vanmali, PhD, and Professor De Wet Swanepoel (University of Pretoria) presenting Husmita's PhD poster at the 3rd Internet and Audiology Meeting at the University of Louisville, July 2017.

which reflected a novel concept at the time. Being a first mover, using technology is inherent to my personality profile, and I was inspired to use the available software to host and facilitate online trainings. In terms of transferability of skills, having had clinical experience seeing patients was extremely valuable. Being able to bring these insights and reality into all aspects of the business was crucial in understanding the patient perspective and the everyday reality of an audiology professional to ensure solutions/materials were addressing both these user groups' pain points.

The environment at Demant headquarters is conducive to evolving

personally and professionally, highlighting the work-life balance or what some refer to as work-life integration. As I developed my professional skillset, it became apparent that strategy and solution-based challenges were my strengths. I am incredibly grateful for my various roles and opportunities over my career within the Demant family where I have constantly been provided with an environment in which I am able to grow and play towards my strengths.

Furthermore, I have been able to interact with amazing researchers and clinicians within the Centre for Applied Audiology Research Group at Oticon and the world's leading applied hearing research facility Eriksholm Research Centre, also part of Oticon. The centre, which was established in 1976, has evolved into a world-class facility, attracting top-tier scientists from around the globe. Its vibrant and collaborative environment fosters interdisciplinary research, sparking ground-breaking ideas and translating them

“As part of my role, I define global audiological care and, together with my international colleagues, I support in implementing global strategies for clinical best practices, education, and innovation”

AUDIOLOGY FEATURE



Husmita having a little fun during her PhD graduation.



Behind the scenes – a sneak peek into Husmita's head of audiology role.

into impactful solutions to significantly enhance end-user benefits in future hearing health. Having access to these brightest minds within the industry is rewarding as it enables me to integrate scientific and clinical research and insights into our daily work.

A few years later, a short-term adventure awaited me across the seas at Oticon Canada where I diversified my skillset and developed an improved understanding of audiology professionals, their challenges, and needs. This role was intense, knowing solutions to challenging clinical questions and patient needs were required on an urgent basis. Thus, I gained further understanding of the market from a different perspective and simultaneously enhanced my solution-based skillset.

After having returned from Canada to Denmark, I wanted to combine my passion for technology and hearing healthcare with my interest in research, and subsequently pursued my PhD studies in South Africa. The concept was novel and challenged traditional nuances, and I was fortunate that the value of our concept and hypothesis was appreciated and supported by colleagues and academic peers, which resulted in a grant from the William Demant Foundation and the National Research Foundation of South Africa's Innovation Doctoral Research Fund.

As part of the study, we established a non-profit hearing research clinic in South Africa where I could consult with patients and ensure my research findings had real-life relevance across the entire patient journey, as demonstrated by our data.

We have decided to close the clinic after three years but have kept the website

running due to the fantastic research findings and impact of the PhD studies within the field of audiology: <https://hearingresearchclinic.org/>.

It's ironic to think that when the study began in 2017, many were questioning the need for tele-services within hearing healthcare but, when the research concluded in 2020, we were at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, making our research and findings relevant. My PhD research resulted in several publications in recognised international journals, and in 2020 we received the Editor's Award for the most influential article in the *American Journal of Audiology*, entitled: 'Digital Proficiency Is Not a Significant Barrier for Taking Up Hearing Services With a Hybrid Online and Face-to-Face Model' [1].

After completing my PhD in 2020, I took on a newly created role as head of audiology for the Audika Group, which is the hearing care business of Demant. As part of my role, I define global audiological care and, together with my international colleagues, I support in implementing global strategies for clinical best practices, education, and innovation.

Every day I learn more about audiology professionals, what motivates us in the workplace and what we wish for to make our daily work environments better suited to providing improved optimal care for patients. I am grateful to be part of an organisation where I can strive to place audiology at the centre of everything I develop, and enable my clinical training to inform other business units of the reality of audiology professionals.

References

1. Ratanjee-Vanmali H, Swanepoel DW, Laplante-Lévesque A. Digital Proficiency Is Not a Significant Barrier for Taking Up Hearing Services With a Hybrid Online and Face-to-Face Model. *American Journal of Audiology* 2020;29(4):785-808.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

I have always strived to combine my academic expertise, clinical experience, and global perspective to create positive change for people with hearing loss. Besides audiology, I am also a passionate advocate for female empowerment. My top tips are:

1. Have a clear vision.
2. Be resilient and take calculated risks.
3. Most importantly, surround yourself with supportive individuals and seek out mentors who can provide guidance and support.

AUTHOR



Husmita Ratanjee-Vanmali, PhD,
Head of Audiology, Audika Group, Denmark.

Declaration of competing interests: HRV is employed by the Audika Group which is a part of Demant A/S.