

Tish Gaffney – AAA President

From a sunny Southend, UK, Gareth Smith takes 10 minutes to dial into the Sunshine State, USA, and catch up with Tish Gaffney for a lightning-speed chat on the movements and motivations of the 35th president of the American Academy of Audiology.



Tish in Brussels, Belgium, in 2024.

Prof Patricia Gaffney, AuD, MPH,

Professor, Department of Audiology, Nova Southeastern University, Florida, USA; President, American Academy of Audiology.

Declaration of competing interests:
None declared.

Can you tell us a little about the AAA? What are the headline stats?

The American Academy of Audiology was founded in 1988 as an organisation for all audiologists in the United States. This was a departure from the American Speech Language and Hearing Association which represented two different professions, with audiologists being the minority of members. AAA is the largest audiology only organisation in the world.

As president, what are your key roles?

My key roles are leading the board through decision-making processes, maintaining the fiduciary health of the organisation and helping to plan the conference. Throughout the year, I work closely with our executive director to set the agenda for the topics we need to address.

And about yourself: what are the three things we need to know about Tish Gaffney?

First is that I'm a vestibular audiologist. Second is that I'm a dog person; I have two Shetland sheepdogs. Third, I love to travel.

What motivated you to step up to take a role on the board of directors, and then to the president's role?

Since I was a student, I wanted to volunteer in this presidential role. I love to volunteer for my profession and have participated in roles in several organisations. For me, the AAA president position is the ultimate role of volunteering. It is a lot of work, but I know I'm serving my colleagues and patients across the country.

What are you looking forward to in your presidential year? What are the challenges faced right now by audiologists in the States?

I'm looking forward to continued improvement of our membership services, such as our certifications, the conference and journal. The biggest challenge in the

States for audiologists is reimbursement for services. The healthcare schemes for insurance are complex in the US and we are seeing a decrease in reimbursement and payments for services. We work hard for changes in legislation but our government can be very slow to change anything. This is a challenge that has existed before my term and will continue after my term.

How would you define success for your presidential year?

Presidential success, as I would define it, is increasing our membership, increasing attendance at our annual convention in New Orleans, and improved member benefits.

I know you are passionate about all things vestibular; how did you get into balance and what keeps you interested?

I got into vestibular because of the puzzle. I always talk to my students about how in vestibular you are taking so many pieces of information and trying to match them to different pathologies, which makes it an intriguing decision-making process. I stay interested in it because we are learning so much all the time. Understanding of the vestibular system lags behind the auditory system and, therefore, there is so much for us to learn about the vestibular system function, assessment and treatment. I'm so excited to see how vestibular audiology will continue to evolve over my lifetime.

Who are your mentors / role models?

I've had so many people influence my career. Dave Fabry and Catherine Palmer have been mentors since I was a student. They have provided great advice through my career. Devin McCaslin has also been a role model who has been an amazing colleague and friend, especially in terms of vestibular.

What are the most important lessons your professional career has taught you?

The first is how small our profession is. There is very little separation from one audiologist



Shetland sheepdogs, Islay and Jura.

to another. This is something I stress to students as well because you don't want to burn bridges. This can also be a huge benefit because you get to know a lot of colleagues which helps with patient referrals, questions and sharing of information.

What do you tell your students at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) to inspire them as the next generation of audiologists?

One thing I talk to students about is change. Audiology has changed since I graduated, between research, testing procedures and technology. Some students get stressed

thinking about the future of audiology. I tell them there will always be a place for audiology, but we need to be adaptive and embrace change, as the future of audiology will be different to what it is right now.

What text should every student of audiology read?

Since my audiology world is vestibular, the most comprehensive book I would recommend is *Balance Function Assessment and Management*.

When you are not at NSU or in the president's role for the AAA, what do you get up to? What are your passions?

In my spare time I love spending time with my two shelties, Islay and Jura. I have previously competed in agility and am looking forward to training my puppy Jura in it. I also love travelling, both around the US and outside the country. For international travel, in 2023 I went to Belgium just to attend the Stromae concert and, in 2024, I travelled to Sweden to attend the Barany Conference.

INTERVIEWER



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