

ABSTRACT

Laryngectomees are the clinical population who use artificial larynx devices to speak after their larynx has been surgically removed, typically due to cancer. Approximately 12,000 people are diagnosed with laryngeal cancer each year. With several thousand laryngectomies being performed in the United States, the electronic artificial larynx device is one modality used for alaryngeal communication. Many people learn to speak using an artificial larynx device which they will use to convey information, ask questions, and carry on with their lives and communication needs. Many laryngectomees will receive guidance from speech-language therapists in the procurement and training of the device.

Considered to be the groups most closely associated with artificial larynx devices, this investigation studied the perceptions of laryngectomees and speech-language pathologists regarding reliability issues. Using a survey model, instruments were sent to speech-language therapists certified by the American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) and members of the Special Interest Group in Voice. Instruments were also randomly sent to laryngectomees who were members of new voice clubs under the International Association of Laryngectomees (IAL).

Data were collected from 228 speech pathologists and 160 laryngectomee respondents located throughout the United States. The survey instruments paralleled each other and queried aspects of reliability, selection, and other facets. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, data were analyzed.

Results from the analysis showed that perceptions of reliability, or changes over time, closely parallel each other for both groups. Problems such as decreased volume,

increased distortion, and battery difficulties were identified. The features and characteristics thought to be important to speech therapists were different from those of laryngectomees. Aspects such as sound quality and ease of use were more important to therapists than to the actual users of the equipment. Laryngectomees were more in tuned with such aspects as cost, volume, and ease of procurement. The Servox Inton, by a large gap, was the most prevalent device recommended and used in the United States. Overall, laryngectomees were satisfied with the function and reliability of the equipment that allows them to communicate. Based on the information analyzed in this study, some recommendations are offered to speech-language pathologists and manufacturers of artificial larynx equipment.