

'A world of difference'

Deaf woman is able to hear after surgery

BORN SEVERELY hearing impaired, Jane Schwab of Redford hears no sounds at all until age 5 when she was fitted with two hearing aids. Then a whole new world opened up for her.

She attended a school for the deaf that first year and her mother worked endlessly with her, teaching her how to speak and read lips. But even with hearing aids, Schwab's hearing degenerated over the years to a point where she was totally deaf and had developed a loud ringing in her ears.

To talk with her mother by long-distance telephone, she would be on one extension. Her husband, Richard, or one of her sons would be on the other extension. They would repeat what her mother was saying so that she could read their lips and she would respond to her mother.

It was frustrating and by no means private.

But it was a means of communicating.

THEN HER mother read and sent her an article that changed her life. The newspaper story was about Dr. Warren Brandes, a Farmington Hills physician who was one of only a few physicians nationally working with a new hearing device — the cochlear implant.

Two years ago the 39-year-old Redford Township woman, who works for FTD in Southfield, became one of Brandes' first patients to have the cochlear implant surgery.

"It's made a world of difference," said Schwab. "It's given me a world of sounds I only used to imagine and for the first time I can really talk on the phone. I sometimes have trouble distinguishing between words that rhyme, like 'il' and 'ple', but if I know the person's voice I can usually understand pretty well."

Brandes, an osteopathic physician and surgeon who specializes in ears, nose and throat, is one of few physicians in Michigan who perform cochlear implant surgery and was the first physician in the tri-county area to perform the surgery after it



The sound processor fits on Schwab's belt.

good candidate for a cochlear implant, said Brandes.

"I sit down and talk to the patient first to see why he or she wants to do the operation. To see if there is a realistic expectation of what will occur. If the patient is a candidate as far as emotional maturity is concerned, and there is a realistic expectation, then we go ahead and do some tests."

"Jane was a good candidate for the surgery because she was highly motivated, she's an intelligent individual, she has excellent family support, she had already developed good speech, she's young, and she had only recently totally lost her hearing."

Brandes does tests to make sure that the person will be receptive to the implant. He then does what is called a promontory stimulation, where a small electrode is placed right on the cochlea in the ear, stimulating it electrically.

"If the patient hears beeps, then we know there is a functioning cochlear nerve and he or she is probably a viable candidate for the surgery," said Brandes.

SCHWAB FAIRLY beams when she recalls the test.

"I could hear the beeps. It was the first time I ever heard anything without the use of my hearing aids," she said.

There are two types of cochlear implants: single channel and 22-channel implants. The single channel implant is most often recommended for those individuals who are described as pre-lingual, they became deaf prior to learning to speak.

Following the surgery, Schwab worked with a team of audiologists and therapists for about six weeks. She literally had to learn what the sounds she was hearing were.

"It was funny. The day they hooked the whole thing up, I was driving home with the window down a little. I kept hearing a whooshing sound. When I got home I asked Richard if that was how the cars going by sounded. I had never heard them before. He said, 'Yes.'"

During the training process, therapists worked with her by reading words or passages from books while she followed on the page, not looking at the therapist. They would have her point to the word she heard or asked her to begin to read where they left off. Because she wasn't looking at them, they could determine if she was actually hearing them correctly and not just lip reading.

SCHWAB'S HUSBAND of 20 years couldn't believe it when he attended her last session.

"I was surprised at how she was responding to them without even looking at them. We certainly communicate better today than we ever have before. She used to hardly talk at all but now she talks all the time. And she used to have trouble understanding what I was trying to say to her. It's no longer difficult for her to understand and it's really improved our relationship."

The two met when they were both vacationing in Hawaii. They plan to go back for their 25th wedding anniversary. This time they will both be able to enjoy the sounds of the waves crashing on the shore and they will both hear the calls of the tropical birds.

Now, Schwab is excited about something closer to home. "I can even hear the birds chirping in a nest outside the kitchen window with the window closed."

"People should be grateful if they can hear," said Schwab, who works as a keypunch operator at FTD World Headquarters in Southfield.

"They have no idea what it's like not covered by insurance. Brandes said most insurance companies are now covering the procedure. This hasn't been true from the beginning and Brandes has campaigned with the insurance companies, educating them about the procedure and why it should be reimbursed."

Brandes is one of four physicians in E.N.T. Surgical Associates in Farmington Hills.



Talking on the telephone is now a normal experience for Jane Schwab of Redford.

to hear little sounds, normal sounds. I can't tell you what a joy it is to hear my family, to hear my boys yelling and screaming outside."

The Schwabs have two sons, James, 7, and Richard Jr., 11. Their godson, Eric, 18, also lives with them.

THE COCHLEAR implant has an average cost of \$20,000 to \$30,000. In the Schwab's case, most of it was

covered by insurance. Brandes said most insurance companies are now covering the procedure. This hasn't been true from the beginning and Brandes has campaigned with the insurance companies, educating them about the procedure and why it should be reimbursed.

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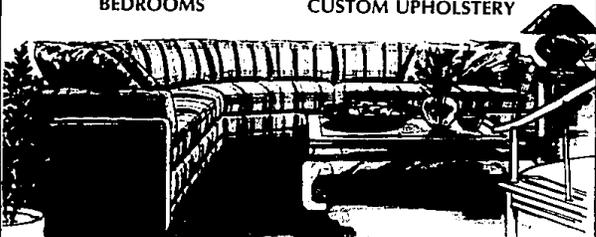
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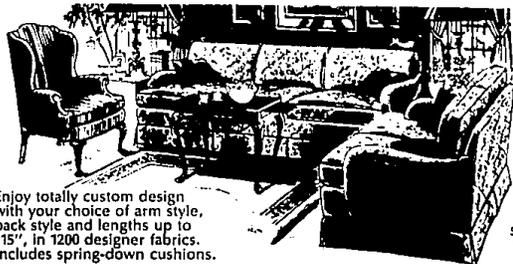


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