

Cell phone inspires ear specialist to design affordable hearing aid

By Celeste busk cbusk@suntimes.com Mar 17, 2011 2:41PM



The MDHearingAid is priced at \$179.99, a fraction of the cost of typical hearing devices. | Photo provided

Although 36 million people in the United States need hearing aids, experts say 77 percent go without them because of the expense.

"Approximately 23 percent of the insurance companies won't pay for a hearing aid," said Dr. Sreekant Cherukuri, an ear, nose and throat doctor based in Michigan City, Ind.

"Today, the cost of a hearing aid ranges from \$800 to more than \$1,200. They're a luxury many simply cannot afford," Cherukuri said.

So, two years ago he created an affordable hearing aid — the MDHearingAid — priced at \$179.99 for one ear device and \$329.99 for a pair.

The latest model, the MDHearingAid PRO, which is registered with the FDA, is for patients with mild to moderately severe hearing loss who can't afford a custom device or simply do not want to pay the high price tag, Cherukuri said.

As people age, hearing lessens. About one-third of Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 have hearing problems, statistics from the National Council on Aging (NCA) show, while about half of those 85 and older have hearing loss.

Whether a hearing loss is small — missing certain sounds — or large — being profoundly deaf — it is a serious concern. If left untreated, problems can get worse and lead to depression, anxiety, paranoia and isolation, the NCA warns.

The doctor said he first got the idea for the affordable hearing device when he noticed how affordable the iPhone was when it was introduced in 2007.

"I felt that if someone could devise an affordable device like an iPhone for about \$200 that could do all sorts of things, I could create a hearing device with a similar price point," Cherukuri said.

"My hearing aid line offers patients an opportunity to get a significant improvement [in hearing] with a far less expensive device," he said.

Chicagoan Gigi Lubin has been wearing a hearing aid for seven years. "My first one cost \$1,600 and was not covered by insurance," said Lubin, a spokesman for MDHearingAid.

"I tried the MDHearingAid and don't see a big difference between the expensive one and this one. I also love the fact that if I lose it, I'm only out less than \$200 rather than \$1,600," Lubin said.

For more information on the hearing aid device, call (888) 670-4327 or visit www.MDHearingAid.com.