



THE CASE FOR COCHLEAR IMPLANT

Expanding your services to meet the growing needs of patients

Dr. Joanie Davis Au.D., F-AAA, CCC-A

Dr. Joanie Davis is a Board Certified Doctor of Audiology and the owner of Davis Family Hearing, a multiple location practice in the heart of Florida. She regularly recommends Cochlear Implants for appropriate patients and explains her CI journey from hesitation to an enthusiastic recommendation. Read about our conversation with Joanie and what impact implementing CI services has had on her practice.

For patients with profound hearing loss, where hearing aids may not be the best fit, what solutions have you found?

In many ways, patients with profound hearing loss are no different from my other patients – they have come to me asking for help and it is my job to help them. I want to ensure that every patient that walks through my doors walks out happy and with a significantly improved quality of life. I had explored just about every hearing aid option out there, but I still felt like I wasn't able to provide my profound hearing loss patients with a satisfactory solution. Now, I recommend cochlear implants (CIs) in my practice, and it's been a great success for us. I feel like I am truly able to offer a solution to everyone.

What made you decide to start offering cochlear implants?

One patient forever allowed me to fully understand the impact of cochlear implants. A few years ago, Lizzy came into my office and mentioned that she was interested in a cochlear implant but wanted to try the best possible hearing aids before she made her final decision. I fitted her with hearing aids and offered her a free month-long trial. While this was standard approach for me at the time, I wanted to be sure she didn't feel pressured to settle for a hearing aid and take the time she needed to feel like she had truly exhausted every option. I gave her extra time and saw her for weekly follow-ups, and after two months, she came in and started crying and apologizing to me. She said that she had decided to proceed with a cochlear implant but was upset because I had worked with her so long, and she did not want to have to establish a relationship with another audiologist. It was in that moment that I committed to CIs – I wanted to be confident that I could treat every single patient, no matter how severe their hearing loss. Lizzy received a CI a few months later. It turned out to be life-changing. Lizzy has been doing remarkably well with her implant, and it is wonderful to see. What's more, to this day she is still my patient. I am able to offer her a full spectrum of services for her cochlear implant and the hearing aids she still wears on her opposite ear. Lizzy cannot drive long distances, so it is priceless for her to have all of the care that she needs only a 10 minute drive from her home.

What was your biggest misconception about cochlear implants?

I thought that cochlear implants were highly technical and very complicated to learn. When I went through school, there were no courses on cochlear implants, so my exposure was pretty minimal. In my mind, cochlear implants became this nearly mystical device that was just too cumbersome to tackle. Now I look back and laugh at all of that – reality is they can be as simple as hearing aids, fewer items to adjust overall, very straight forward, and with plenty of support.

How have cochlear implants impacted your business?

At first I feared that recommending implants might negatively affect my business because cochlear implants frequently require more follow-up care and have a lower reimbursement rate than hearing aids. I have found the reality to be the exact opposite. I work in an increasingly competitive market and recommending a cochlear implant helps me to differentiate my business. There are plenty of hearing aid specialists in my area, but very few audiologists that are comfortable with cochlear implants. In fact, I would even go as far as to say that CIs have expanded the reach of my business. We have found that offering CI services has increased the distance people are willing to drive to our practice.

What is better than being able to reach a larger number of patients who desperately need your expertise and services? Also, word of mouth referrals have increased exponentially. We started offering cochlear implant services, and in the three years after we started recommending CI, we grew 30%. My cochlear implant patients are among my biggest advocates and are eager to refer their friends to me, many of which are hearing aid candidates!

What do you enjoy most about working with CIs?

It is priceless to participate in such a pivotal event in someone's life. Being able to offer such a dramatic improvement in quality of life to a patient who has been so frustrated for such a long time is an extremely rewarding experience. Next, I really enjoy learning. So much is changing in the hearing healthcare field, and I love being on the cutting edge of technology. Last, CIs have really helped elevate my practice.

Patient acquisition can be tough these days, don't you worry that referring a patient for a CI means giving them away?

Not at all. Referring a patient for a cochlear implant does not mean I am giving them away. Instead, it means that I'm creating a lifelong customer and an advocate. While I don't handle the actual cochlear implant surgery, I support every other facet. This means that I manage their initial stimulation, their follow-up appointments, any programming and adjustments and even the initial cochlear implant recommendation before referring the for surgery. The only part of the cochlear implantation process I do not perform is the surgery, which means these patients view me as their primary hearing doctor. Secondly, referring to local CI surgeons has increased my referral base. Because we have such a great relationship with the CI surgeons, they are very willing to refer their patients to us in order to reduce the patient's drive. Lastly, many patients will continue to wear a hearing aid unilaterally.

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What would you suggest to an audiologist who is considering taking the first steps towards recommending cochlear implants, but is unsure?

Stop hesitating and give it a try. The return on this investment is more than worth it and you will never look back or regret the leap. The satisfaction of being part of the process to help patients who have been struggling with their hearing for so long finally thrive is incredibly rewarding.

The Cochlear Provider Network (CPN) enables independent dispensing audiology/ENT practices to expand their services to include cochlear implants and become part of a medical network that helps people with hearing loss achieve optimal outcomes.

To learn more about the Continuum of Care and the CPN, go to <https://web.sycle.net/continuum-of-care/>.

