

# **RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF HEARING AID DEALERS AND FITTERS**

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

**May 4, 2012**

**The Open Session of the Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Fitters was called to order at 8:48 a.m. on the above date in Room 104, Cannon Building, Department of Health, Three Capitol Hill, Providence, Rhode Island, pursuant to the applicable provisions of the Open Meeting Law, so called, and other applicable provisions of the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island, as amended. A quorum was established.**

**Board members in attendance: Board members not in attendance:**

**James Healey**

**Cathy Atkinson**

**Edward Melusky Staff members in attendance:**

**Michael Lancia J. Michel Martineau**

**Others in attendance:**

**Shelley Deming, Allied Court Reporters**

**Shelley Deming of Allied Court Reporters asks the administrator if a quorum is present. The administrator notes the board composition is 6 Members, currently there are 2 vacancies, 1 HAD, and 1 Otolaryngologist. Board members suggest the appointment of a**

physician who is not a specialist may be more practical than the specialist currently required. This would involve a change in HAD Law.

**Topic: United HealthCare:**

Board members state that as it pertains to hearing aids, United Health Care (UHC) is directing policy holders over the age of 65 (Medicare) to a wholly owned subsidiary named hi Health Innovations and much if not all of this communication is being done online. Members express the importance of face to face contact for numerous aspects of the process of selecting a hearing aid, specifically, reviewing, purchasing and adjusting the hearing aid. Members express concern that one or more UHC patients have expressed confusion over the information they receive. A board member notes it is also confusing from the practitioner side as UHC changes the rules quickly. A board member notes that missing from the Purchase Agreement is the name of the Audiologist and their license number. An Audiologist who is doing the fitting must be licensed in RI and that understand they are responsible for doing a proper fitting for the client, including making sure the patient does not have wax. Board members ask where is the UHC associated Audiologist, in RI or MN?

Board member Edward Melusky expresses concern with the UNC process; he notes that appropriate services should be available, specifically post fit adjustment. He also notes UHC lists guidance for numerous states, but not RI. Also, where is the safeguard for

**consumer protection?**

**Member Michael Lancia indicates a certain hearing aid device provides for over 136 decibels and this may cause damage to a person's ear if they are not properly suited for this instrument. A patient may have a wax buildup and not require greater than 136 decibels, it is also noted that an audiologist would review other possible disturbances before determining the necessity for a product that provides for greater than 136 decibels.**

**Members state the UHC approach has the effect of relegating HAD to a secondary status and this does not serve and safeguard the public. From a best practice perspective, UHC is a disgrace as they will change the marketplace to be chaotic, pressuring elderly persons to participate.**

**It is understood if a UHC patient does not go to hi Health Innovations for their hearing aid needs, UHC will not pay.**

**Board members direct the administrator to draft a letter seeking clarification from UHC to the practices noted. The letter will contain at a minimum references to the following a) face to face contact, b) does an audiologist sign off, is audiologist licensed in RI or another state, c) Is hearing aid test conducted in RI, where in RI, or is it in another state, d) fitting and impression and, is the device a Hearing Aid.**

**Topic: IHS Practical exam**

**Board members express dissatisfaction with the current Practical exam as conducted, they state IHS has a Practical exam format we should consider. Current RI exam includes outdated references.**

**Topic: Prerequisite requirements for Temporary Permit**

**Members indicate it may be useful to require certain education, experience, and / or passing the IHS Written Exam prior to granting the Temp permit. A board member states that adequate experience prior to obtaining a Temporary Permit may remove the need for a Practical Exam. The administrator suggests he could check with other states to determine their minimum qualifications, members direct him to consult IHS as they are a very good resource for this and other information.**

**Topic: Continuing Education:**

**Member Michael Lancia advises we open the regs for CE and other changes.**

**Based upon legal guidance, it is determined RIGL 5-94-4 (b), as well as section 5.2 of the HAD Rules & Regs, indicate a physician must hold a HAD license to sell hearing aids. An Audiologist is not required to hold a HAD license to sell hearing aids.**

**Minutes of the meeting held February 12, 2009 were presented. On a**

**motion by James Healey seconded by Cathy Atkinson, the Board unanimously voted to accept the minutes as presented.**

### **Adjournment**

**On a motion by Dr. James Healey, seconded by Cathy Atkinson, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:17 am.**

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**J. Michel Martineau**

**Board Administrator**