Users of Hearing Aids Seek Do-It-Yourself Improvements

July 6, 2012

Adjusting a modern hearing aid to fit the wearer's individual needs may take multiple visits to a trained audiologist. To bypass this drawn-out process, tech-savvy hearing aid users are figuring out ways to tweak the devices to improve their hearing, BBC News reports.

One such hacker, the Munich-based software engineer Helga Velroyen, noted that because the average age of a first-time German hearing aid buyer is 70, the hearing aids are kept simple to appeal to that audience. "Young people who grew up with computers and have a smartphone have the desire to have more control over their devices and would not mind a more sophisticated interface," she said.

Another frustration that inspires hacking, according to Velroyen, is that many of the parts and accessories for hearing aids are not interchangeable among different brands.

Since the equipment needed to tune hearing aids is not available to the general public, some hackers have established fake companies in order to procure it. Others are working on their own hearing aid designs that the wearer can adjust.

"This idea that you are not qualified to tune your own hearing aid that you are wearing for hours and hours every day seems ridiculous," said Edinburgh-based engineer Martin Ling, who is working on his own hearing aid design and is contemplating a crowd-funded prototype on a site like Kickstarter.

Experts have expressed skepticism about the prospect of such homebrewed hearing aids, noting that established manufacturers have invested huge sums in developing the models that are currently available. As Kevin Munro, PhD, a professor of audiology at the University of Manchester, said: "They are not the sorts of things you can throw together in a garden shed."

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