

Caring for Communication: Janna Smith Lang, Ph.D.

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Janna Smith Lang

The phone rings in Janna Smith Lang's office at the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. It is a frantic mother Lang has worked with over the years as an audiologist

and coordinator of the Newborn Hearing Screening Program. This mother has an IEP meeting coming up for her profoundly hard of hearing child, and she does not know what to expect. What will be discussed? What

questions should she ask? What would be in the best interest for her child? Lang spends a few minutes calming her fears by educating her and guiding her through

this seemingly frightening bureaucratic process, and then she gathers up her materials to head up to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, and the "Well-Baby" Nursery to conduct hearing screenings and to follow-up on the newborns with possible hearing losses. It will be a busy day for Janna Smith Lang at the hospital—but as a pioneer in the state of California for the audiologists' job of carrying out newborn hearing screenings, she's used to it.

Lang says that out of the plethora of professional experiences she has had over the years as an audiologist, "devoting herself to the newborns has been the most fulfilling." Getting herself to where she is today has been an exciting ride for Lang. She seems to have done it all when it comes to the audiology spectrum—including university teaching, research audiology, and running her own private practice. However, her current position not only allows her to be a hands-on clinician, but she also has the role of developing the policies and procedures for newborn hearing screening programs in several hospitals in Northern California. And that is a big job—in one hospital alone, there are over 5000 infant births each year that the hospital handles. Developing the policies of these hospital programs should also come naturally to her; after all, she was involved at the state level in developing the newborn screenings law and

guidelines, as well as being on the California Children's Services (CCS) advisory panel for the implementation of the law.

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Cochlear implants are also an area of expertise for Lang. As an audiologist that consults many parents with deaf or hard of hearing children on the options that are available such as hearing aids and manual communication (e.g. American Sign Language, SEE signs, etc.), she is a strong supporter of the cochlear implant. She often speaks about its benefits at CSHA workshops and encourages appropriate candidates' parents to seriously consider them. Although they are controversial, she points out that, in the long run, cochlear implants simply offer more opportunities for a person with a profound hearing loss. She also notes that the speech of a child that receives a cochlear implant is much more natural because the cochlear implant is better at picking up the higher frequency speech sounds (e.g. voiceless consonants) around them. Thus, the child will be more exposed to the normal speech of many children surrounding them in the classroom environment.

It is quite an accomplishment to be such a profound influence in our profession at a state and national level, and to the thousands of newborns and their families she treats. However, Janna Smith Lang instead focuses on the incidental moments as her greatest source of joy in the profession of Audiology. When asked about her proudest moment as a talented leader in our field, she recalls when she simply made a child feel good about himself. She had received an expression of gratitude one day from a former client. It was a picture of a profoundly hard of hearing child with a huge smile across his face, and the caption written by this child read, "Don't I look cute with my hearing aids on?" I can safely say she speaks for all of us when she said in response, "This is why I'm in this business." ♦