

"Hearing aids tested by the VA are broken down into three groups on the basis of power; mild, moderate, and strong. This classificatory scheme is generally accepted throughout the industry."

The report draws this conclusion:

"An ordinary citizen, possessed of the information available to the VA as a result of its testing program, would be in a much better position to get the best buy for his dollar. He would be an informed consumer."

"Yet, this information is not now available to hearing aid consumers * * * the success of the VA program in increasing the level of knowledge about hearing aid quality and thereby substantially reducing prices, suggest the possibility that information could be made available to the general public so they, too, can enjoy the social and economic advantages of being well informed about hearing aids currently on the market."

I agree. It is clear that the brand and model information now available and kept up-to-date in the files of the VA requires only simple processing to improve the lot of hundreds of thousands of hard-of-hearing people and provide audiologists with information they need to permit them to prescribe intelligently. The potential savings to the consumer, typically among the older members of the population and often the poorer ones, are also detailed in the report and are vast. I emphasize that the hearing aids material is an example of what we know is available in the files of the Federal agencies for many other consumer products. The need for getting it to the consumer is great, the wherewithal for many products is available and the benefits to the individual consumer and to the Nation at large. All it takes is the will.

As a committee of the Nation's legislators you will know how to muster this will. Should the Freedom of Information Act, to become effective next week, be interpreted or amended to allow such information as I have been discussing to be made public? Should your committee ask the Federal agencies why they are not making this information public in line with the expressed conviction of two Presidents that the consumer has a right to be informed? Should your committee supplement your 1961 report on Consumer Protection Activities of Federal Departments and Agencies with another that lists product information now available, being obtained, or capable of being obtained with existing staff, expertise, and facilities that would be of benefit to consumers if made public in suitable form?

The consumer needs your help. You have it in your power to give it to him at almost no cost. I hope you will.

APPENDIX.—PRICES OF HEARING AIDS, REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, U.S. SENATE

Persons interviewed were asked to identify areas in which results of tests performed by the Federal Government were published in such a way as to indicate the commercial brands tested. They were also asked to identify areas in which comparative evaluation of commercial products was done.

The following are the types of activities identified and examples of the products involved:

UNPUBLISHED TEST RESULTS

1. Comparative tests of different brands of a product. Examples:
 - (a) Hearing aids, done by the National Bureau of Standards for VA.
 - (b) Batteries, done by NBS for VA and the Coast Guard.
 - (c) Tires, done by NBS for the FBI.
 - (d) Qualified products list testing.

Qualified products list testing (QPL) is done by GSA, and by NBS on behalf of GSA, on products for which no method has been devised for establishing a minimum standard. Included in this list of 38 products are oil filters, cellophane tape, flashlights, solder, paints, popup toasters, and other diverse products. In the case of hearing aids, VA does its own comparative evaluation of the test results. NBS provides only the raw data.

In the case of batteries, test results are correlated to a minimum standard of performance. In addition, batteries are ranked on the basis of test performance. In the case of tires, the different brands were both ranked and evaluated by NBS.

2. Tests done for the purpose of establishing minimum quality standards. GSA does such tests for a great variety of products, and commissions such tests from NBS, other Government agencies, and private testing organizations.