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American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACI Alliance) Awards Telehealth Innovation Grant to University of California San Francisco Medical Center

Washington, D.C.: The American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACI Alliance) is a not-for-profit membership organization created with the purpose of eliminating barriers to cochlear implantation by sponsoring research, driving heightened awareness and advocating for improved access to cochlear implants for patients of all ages across the US.

ACI Alliance is pleased to announce the award of a one-time grant to the Douglas Grant Cochlear Implant Center at University of California San Francisco Medical Center (UCSF) to study “The Development of a Cloud-Based System for Remote Cochlear Implant Programming and Speech Perception Testing.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the need for transformative and innovative approaches to providing care to cochlear implant (CI) patients and candidates. This grant was awarded to support data collection and research that may be used to justify financial reimbursement of telehealth for CI-related services by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and other insurers. ACI Alliance encouraged proposals which involved innovative team-based approaches incorporating elements of diagnosis, programming and/or rehabilitation. The award is intended to facilitate the grant recipient’s preparation of a more comprehensive individualized research plan suitable for submission to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or comparable funding agency. ACI Alliance reviewed each proposal thoroughly using a robust NIH-style review.

The grant was awarded to Colleen Polite PhD, Senior Audiologist and Assistant Director of the Douglas Grant Cochlear Implant Center at University of California San Francisco Medical Center (serving as Principal Investigator for the grant) and Charles Limb MD, also of UCSF. The proposed research focuses on a model of remote programming and CI speech perception testing. The televisit would take place in the patient’s home with the vision of ultimately creating a cloud-based system for remote cochlear implant programming and speech perception testing.

Donna Sorkin, Executive Director of the ACI Alliance, notes that “ACI Alliance advocacy during COVID has emphasized the need for CI telehealth insurance coverage—both now and during the post pandemic timeframe. We supported several legislative proposals including the Knowing the Efficiency and Efficacy of Permanent (KEEP) Telehealth Options Act of 2020, a bipartisan bill introduced in the House of Representatives.”

Drs. Polite and Limb stated they are “extremely excited to develop a cloud-based remote programming protocol for cochlear implant patients and grateful for the support from the ACI
Alliance. The important need to develop this kind of approach was identified even before the pandemic, and its urgency has only increased as a result of the global disruptions in health care being experienced by so many patients.”

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