



Cochlear implants business

Partnerships for comprehensive hearing care

Thanks to the partnership between Sonova brands Advanced Bionics and Hansaton, customers can also seek advice about cochlear implants in Hansaton's specialist audiology stores. This offering ensures that Sonova can provide comprehensive care for people with hearing loss.

Franz Hoffmann has been using a cochlear implant in his left ear for about a year. "I feel like I've been reborn," says the sprightly 66-year-old in Hansaton's specialist audiology store in downtown Salzburg. Hoffmann lost his hearing almost completely as an infant, before he could learn to speak, and this naturally affected his speech development. He was only fitted with hearing aids at age 20. It was not until he started using the cochlear implant, however, that he began to make significant progress with his pronunciation. He received additional help with language training from a speech therapist. "He speaks much more clearly using the cochlear implant," confirms Bianca Permenschlager, a Hansaton audiologist.

Over time, Hoffmann's hearing in his left ear had deteriorated so badly that he had reached the technical limitations of hearing aids to compensate. At this point, Permenschlager suggested he consider a cochlear implant.

Advanced Bionics' cochlear implant technology helps people with profound hearing loss; unlike hearing aids, which amplify sounds, cochlear implants bridge the damaged portion of the inner ear and make use of electrical stimulation to enable the recipient to hear. With its highly developed system (consisting of an implant and a sound processor), the cochlear implant is the only technology capable of functionally restoring one of the five human senses. Hoffmann was fitted with the implant in a short surgical procedure.

Regular check-ups for his Naída™ CI sound processor will continue to be carried out as usual by Hansaton. In his right ear, Hoffmann wears a Phonak Naída hearing aid that has been specially developed for use with an Advanced Bionics cochlear implant system. As both devices use the same technological platform, they communicate optimally with one another.

To ensure the best possible care for cochlear implant users at Hansaton, the audiologists in the company's stores work closely with experts at Advanced Bionics. This allows customers to continue being served by a person they know and trust and who has been looking after them for years.

Advanced Bionics works in close cooperation with established ear, nose and throat physicians and leading cochlear implant clinics – so when a Hansaton audiologist decides that a hearing aid is no longer sufficient to compensate for hearing loss (as was the case for Franz Hoffmann), the customer is advised to consult an ENT specialist, who will decide whether a cochlear implant is the right course of action.

“Almost 10% of hearing aid users have profound hearing loss and could benefit from a cochlear implant. There is a real need to inform those affected,” explains Ingrid Hauer, Advanced Bionics’ Country Manager for Austria. To meet this need, Advanced Bionics and Hansaton have teamed up with clinics such as University Hospital Salzburg to organize information events at which potential candidates can find out about the pros and cons of a cochlear implant. Franz Hoffmann attends such events as a “mentor” to recount his experiences with a cochlear implant system. He too sought information from a cochlear implant recipient before his procedure. “It was very important for me at the time. That’s why I’m keen to pass on my personal experiences to other people in similar situations,” he says.

At just such an information event 57-year-old Josef Klaushofer finds himself asking Franz Hoffmann whether – and how – a cochlear implant might help him. The hearing loss in the retired banker’s left ear is now so severe that his hearing aid is due to be replaced with a cochlear implant. The final decision will be taken by Prof. Dr. Gerd Rasp, with whom Mr. Klaushofer has an appointment for a further consultation after the information event. He heads up the ENT department at University Hospital Salzburg and his duties include carrying out the cochlear implant surgery. Klaushofer’s situation seems clear-cut; he is going to need an implant. “It’s not a major procedure,” explains Professor Rasp. “Having your tonsils out is far more dangerous and has a greater impact on the body.” He goes on to describe how the procedure is nonetheless an “intensive process”, as it may take between six months and two years, depending on the patient, for the brain to adapt to a cochlear implant. “But getting used to a hearing aid takes a lot of time as well,” he continues. He is enthusiastic about working with Advanced Bionics and Hansaton: “This combination is opening up real opportunities for people with profound hearing loss.”