

*I sat in the darkened room with my head swathed in an electrode-covered net. In front of me sat a computer. A word appeared on the screen for a brief instant: "blue." When two more words appeared – "turquoise" and "aqua" – I had to choose, as quickly as possible, which one most closely matched the first word. Fifty words later, I was finally done.*

# Lab Rat to Lab Rat: Subjects are people too

BY AMY HARRIS, ATA DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH

The researchers in this *clinical trial* wanted to determine how the human brain behaves when faced with an unclear decision. Clinical trials (studies) use human volunteers to answer specific research questions. Though the clinical trial that I participated in wasn't tinnitus-related, many are. Extremely important for testing tinnitus medications and treatments, these trials have the potential to bring innovative discoveries to the general public.

Tinnitus research can be basic research, clinical research or both. Basic research attempts to determine where and how tinnitus starts, and is covered by the first two paths of ATA's Roadmap to a Cure. Clinical research is usually treatment focused: how can we get tinnitus to *stop*? Clinical researchers study how a certain stimulus, such as a medication, a treatment, or in my case, an unclear decision, affects human beings. The final two paths of the Roadmap to a Cure cover this kind of research.

Both kinds of research are important. Basic tinnitus researchers may attempt to determine, for example, which chemicals in the brain trigger tinnitus. This discovery may eventually lead to the development of a tinnitus drug. In contrast, a research clinician may hear from her patients that an existing drug, developed to treat something other than tinnitus, seems to actually help tinnitus as well. She may then design a clinical trial to determine if this drug is actually helping people with their tinnitus.

Clinical trials can determine how well a treatment works and what side effects it may cause. Dr. Richard Tyler's *Music to Treat Tinnitus* study, which you can read in the June 2007 issue of *Tinnitus Today*, is a good example of a clinical trial.



## Potential advantages of participating

How do you get involved in a clinical trial? And would you want to? There are many positive aspects of being part of a clinical trial. Insuring patient safety is one. All drugs and treatments require that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approve all clinical trials. The Seattle Cancer Care Alliance notes, "No matter how promising a new treatment looks when tested with lab animals, it cannot be used to treat people until it has been carefully evaluated through ... a clinical trial." Clinical trials answer important research questions, helping to *fill in* the paths of the Roadmap. They can also help determine promising directions for future research.

Treatments under study are usually new medications or therapies not yet available to the public. Some participants may find that the treatment in the trial has a positive benefit, and that their tinnitus decreases. If the treatment is more effective than standard treatments, the subject may be among the first to benefit. Subjects may also receive free tinnitus-related medical care and testing while participating in the study.

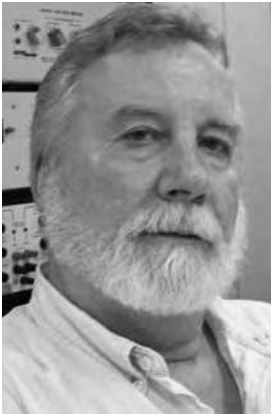
## Possible drawbacks

On the other hand, experimental treatments may carry unknown risks, or may not, in fact, even work. In clinical research, there may be a *control* group that gets a placebo treatment. A placebo is an inactive treatment like a sugar pill. In some studies, chances of being in a control group and not receiving the experimental treatment are as high as 50 percent. Sometimes the cost of the new treatment – or travel to receive the treatment – isn't covered by the researchers or by your health insurance.

*continued on page 19*

# Hello and goodbye on ATA's Scientific Advisory Committee

## Welcome to Tom Brozski, Ph.D.



The American Tinnitus Association warmly welcomes Dr. Thomas J. Brozski as the newest member of our Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). Dr. Brozski brings extensive tinnitus research experience to the committee, including his work as a co-investigator for tinnitus studies at Southern Illinois University on Tinnitus

Retraining Therapy and the anticonvulsant drug gabapentin. Here's how Dr. Brozski explains his interest in curing tinnitus:

"I became interested in tinnitus research 17 years ago when my wife, otolaryngologist Dr. Carol Bauer, asked if I could help design an experiment to replicate the important animal model work of tinnitus researcher Pawel Jastreboff. To my surprise, which bordered on disbelief, we were able to replicate Jastreboff's results using a modified experimental design. Several more experiments also worked as planned. In my own line of research I had never

obtained a string of consecutively successful studies, so I was now hooked on tinnitus research.

"Here at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, I am in the lab most days using animal models to investigate the pathology of chronic tinnitus. Some days, however, I am in the clinic, where I help run one of the ongoing clinical trials evaluating tinnitus therapies. A current buzzword in biomedicine is *translational research*, meaning research that originates in the laboratory and then translates into practical knowledge. We take that challenge seriously and try to apply what we have learned in the lab to tinnitus treatment. Our hope is to contribute to understanding and then curing tinnitus, a condition I myself have struggled with for 30 years."

## Goodbye to five excellent SAC members

Farewell and warm regards to departing SAC members Drs. Carol Bauer, Douglas Mattox, Gloria Reich, Michael Seidman and Rich Tyler. Their contributions to tinnitus research – as reviewers and investigators – have been invaluable to ATA, the research community and those who suffer with tinnitus. We send them our sincere thanks for sharing their time and expertise with ATA and wish them luck in their continuing work toward finding a cure. ☺☺

## Lab Rat to Lab Rat: Subjects are people too

*continued from page 11*

### Are you interested?

If you are interested in getting involved in a clinical trial, the Web site [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov) is a good place to search for research studies that are recruiting human subjects. You can search by condition (tinnitus) or location. Not all scientists post their studies on this Web site. However, many Web sites for individual hospitals and universities have their research information online. These Web sites, which often have a whole section devoted to their research program, usually list the topics that are under investigation, which doctor is overseeing the research, if they are looking for subjects and more. Another option is calling around to your local universities and hospitals. Ask for the research, otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) or neurology department. Or, call all three. Ask if anyone there is doing tinnitus research, and if they are looking for human subjects.

Clinical trials are a vital part of the research process. However, think carefully about your participation. Ask what your costs might be and what side effects may occur. And always talk with your doctor before making a final decision to participate in a clinical trial.

If you sign up, there's always hope that the treatment will work for you. ☺☺

### References

*Clinical Trials/Yahoo!Health*. Retrieved March 29, 2007, from [http://health.yahoo.com/clinical\\_trials/intro/p02.html](http://health.yahoo.com/clinical_trials/intro/p02.html)

*National Cancer Institute, US National Institutes of Health*. Retrieved March 29, 2007, from <http://www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/resources/taking-part-treatment-trials>

*Seattle Cancer Care Alliance*. Retrieved April 2, 2007, from <http://www.seattlecca.org/patientsandfamilies/WhatAreClinicalTrials/TheImportanceClinicalTrials.htm>