

TINNITUS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

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Clinicians and researchers concerned with the effectiveness of tinnitus treatments can benefit from important new insights gained over the past 20 years in the field of treatment effectiveness research. To show how those insights can be applied to measurement of tinnitus treatment effects, we will describe an ongoing research project to develop more sensitive and powerful methods for evaluating treatment-induced changes in tinnitus. The project involves several demographically distinct patient samples (Oregon Health Science University in Portland, OR; the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in Cleveland, OH; and two Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, one in Bay Pines, FL and one in Tampa, FL). The research involves a broad spectrum of technical advisors (highly experienced tinnitus clinicians plus experts in measurement and statistics*) and builds on the comprehensive set of tinnitus measures represented by nine widely used tinnitus questionnaires. A novel Web-based method was employed for developing expert consensus concerning the content validity, precision, and construct validity of outcome measures for tinnitus. Empirical methods are now being used to determine which of those measures, when used in actual clinical practice, display greatest sensitivity for detecting treatment-related changes. We will discuss ways in which measures that are most sensitive for evaluating tinnitus treatment outcomes may differ from those that are most useful as diagnostic measures. Finally, we will show how improving the sensitivity and power of tinnitus outcome measures can reduce the number of subjects required—and therefore the costs—for conducting clinical trials, thus making a significant contribution to current efforts to practice “evidence-based medicine.”

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