



Real and Perceived Inter-System Discrepancies

T K Group is often asked “Why it is that two different data management systems (e.g. HEAR/TRAK versus OHM) generate seemingly differing results and/or baseline discrepancies?”

The short answer to this question is that no two data management software programs function alike. Resultantly, all occupational/audiometric surveillance data management systems possess subtle programming nuances that generate real or perceived inter-system discrepancies.

Many true discrepancies result, in part, because OSHA does mandate baseline revision criteria. Here is one illustration how two systems might report conflicting results. System “A” rounds arithmetic averages up while System “B” rounds arithmetic averages down. On his 2003 annual test, John Doe indicates a shift comparison average of 9.5 dB. Because System “A” rounds up, Joe would indicate a 10 dB STS. System “B” however would not indicate a 10 dB STS. This is but one example of how two systems can develop baseline inconsistencies simply due to the manner in which data is analyzed.

OSHA (appropriately) left baseline to the reviewing audiologist. T K Group audiologists monitor all baseline revisions. Baseline revisions are made pursuant to an accepted, customary professional practice and protocol. In the end, our reviewing audiologists possess the final say on baseline revision and reserve the right to exercise flexibility to amend or revert baselines appropriately in response to unique circumstances.

When comparing one system to another, many inter-system discrepancies are perceived when in reality, none is operative.

Often, perceived discrepancies result simply by differing methods of listing calculated shift averages. For example, some systems list cumulative shift averages as referenced to the first test on record, while others list shift averages as referenced to the previous STS. However, when you crunch the numbers, both systems provide identical and accurate results.

Because many inter-system discrepancies are just not perceived, T K Group does not recommend the implementation of differing data management systems within a facility or corporation. Doing so will likely generate conflicting test outcomes, baseline discrepancies, and skewed hearing loss prevention program summary reports.

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