

Here is the full transcript of ear surgeon Susan Emmett's TED Talk: **This Simple Test Can Help Kids Hear Better**. To learn more about the speaker, read the bio [here](#).

MP3 Audio:

<https://singjupost.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/This-simple-test-can-help-kids-hear-better-by-Susan-Emmett.mp3>

YouTube Video:

Listen to the sounds of why hearing matters to the Alaskan Native people. Hearing loss makes it hard to fish on the open water, hunt caribou and harvest berries, activities central to Alaskan Native culture.

Hearing loss isn't unique to rural Alaska. It's global. The Global Burden of Disease Project estimates that there are 1.1 billion people living with hearing loss worldwide. That's more people than the entire population here in sub-Saharan Africa.

Over 80% are in low- and middle-income countries, and many have no access to hearing care. The impact on people's lives is tremendous. Anuk is a three-year-old boy I treated in Alaska. Ear infections started when he was barely four months old. His parents brought him into clinic, worried he didn't say much compared to his brothers.

Sure enough, many rounds of infections had resulted in hearing loss.

Without treatment, Anuk's speech will continue to lag behind. He's more likely to do worse in school, have worse job prospects and experience social isolation. But it doesn't have to be this way.

The World Health Organization estimates that half of all global hearing loss can be prevented. If Anuk's hearing loss is identified and treated promptly, his life and the opportunities he has as he grows up could look vastly different.

I'm an ear surgeon working with partners around the world on new pathways for hearing loss prevention. This solution comes from my collaboration with a tribal health organization called the **Norton Sound Health Corporation**. Hearing loss evaluation traditionally requires testing by an audiologist in a soundproof room, with a lot of permanent equipment. An ear surgeon then examines Anuk's ears under a microscope and decides a treatment plan.

ALSO READ: [Revisiting Her Side of the Story: Esmé Patterson at TEDxMileHigh \(Full Transcript\)](#)

These resources simply aren't available in remote settings. In a state where 75% of communities aren't connected to a hospital by road, an expensive flight is required. To overcome these barriers, Alaska has developed a state-of-the-art telemedicine system that connects over 250 village health clinics with specialists who triage all types of health concerns. My colleagues have validated that ear-related telemedicine consults are equivalent to an in-person exam.

In 2016, travel was prevented for 91% of patients receiving specialty telemedicine in the Norton Sound region. Telemedicine has saved over 18 million in travel costs in this single region over the past 15 years. Our team is taking the power of telemedicine to a new level, through a project funded by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute.

For the first time, we are merging telemedicine with mobile screening technology that extends the reach of expert triage beyond health care settings. This cell-based screen, developed in South Africa, costs over 10 times less than traditional equipment and does not require advanced training. If I were screening Anuk at school, sound-attenuating headphones and noise monitoring would take the place of a sound booth, and I would use a phone adapter instead of a microscope to examine his ears.

In a matter of minutes, screening and images are done. We then apply Alaska telemedicine technology to transmit the data to specialists, who connect Anuk to the treatment he needs. Our team is launching a randomized trial in 15 communities along the Bering Sea to study how well this intervention works. Our goal is to prevent childhood hearing loss across the state of Alaska.

But the concept is bigger than a single state. The impact is global. Mobile telemedicine can revolutionize access to care. In Malawi, for example, there are only two ear surgeons and 11 audiologists for a population of 17 million. This technology could empower teachers and community health workers to provide access to care to children in places like Malawi. Scaling up globally could change children's lives who have never had access to hearing care before, using just the power of a cell phone.

ALSO READ: Anna Rosling Rönnlund: See How the Rest of the World Lives, Organized by Income (Transcript)

It's time to change the course of preventable hearing loss. Anuk and countless children like him are depending on us. Thank you.

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