

From Chronic Hoarseness to Fresh, New Voice

Anthony LaRocco enjoyed singing as a member of his church choir. But his voice would become strained.

“I was kind of hoarse all the time and developed problems like losing my speaking voice,” shares Anthony, who is 74 and retired. “I thought maybe I was developing nodules on my vocal cords.”

It wasn't the first time Anthony experienced voice strain. In his work before retirement, he sometimes talked on the phone all day.



“I would push my voice because I'd think people couldn't hear me. At the end of the day, I'd be hoarse,” he recalls.

Anthony was concerned that his recent hoarseness from choral singing might be a sign he needed medical attention. He looked for a physician to consult and was impressed by Devang Shah, MD, at Atlantic Ear, Nose & Throat. The practice offers state-of-the-art diagnostic testing of the larynx, or voice box, and voice therapy.

Testing Vocal Cords

“Anthony came to see me with hoarseness, and my first concern is the possibility of a growth or cancer,” notes Dr. Shah. “The first thing we do in that situation is a scope in the office to look for any large lesions in the larynx and vocal cords.

“I didn't see any growths,” he adds, “so the obvious

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question was, *Why is Anthony hoarse?*”

Dr. Shah ordered a *videostroboscopy* for Anthony. The in-office test utilizes a strobe light and high-definition camera for diagnostic testing of the larynx and vocal cords.

“With the naked eye, you can't really see the vocal cords in action because they are moving too fast. The strobe light slows it down so you can actually see the vocal cords vibrating and the vibratory edge,” explains Dr. Shah.

The test revealed abnormal movements in Anthony's vocal cords that created nodules, which are tiny calluses along the edge of the vocal cords.

Dr. Shah recommended voice therapy by Atlantic Ear, Nose & Throat speech pathologist Carinda Stout.

“Voice therapy changes how people use their vocal cords, much like physical therapy changes the way they use muscles and joints,” says Dr. Shah.

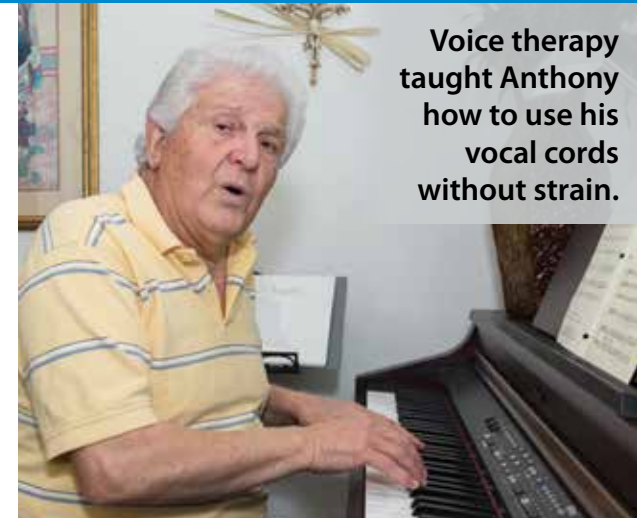
The therapy can also help correct changes in the voice that occur with age. Such changes can make people sound older, sometimes prematurely.

“The way people use the larynx changes over time. Those who develop problems like hoarseness can sound older than they actually are,” explains Dr. Shah. “Voice therapy is a way to improve the quality of sound and how you communicate.”

Stronger, Fuller Voice

“Anthony was overusing his larynx muscles and getting a lower vocal quality,” comments Carinda. “Patients with this problem will come to us with sore throats and tightness. Their voice tends to fade away or the hoarseness gets worse. They have shortness of breath while speaking or a chronic cough. These can all be improved with a course of therapy.”

Carinda taught Anthony how to speak with adequate breath support and control functions such as volume, pitch and resonance. He is a native of Brooklyn with a rapid-fire speaking pace; she encouraged him to slow down.



Voice therapy taught Anthony how to use his vocal cords without strain.

“Generally, six to eight weekly voice therapy sessions of a half-hour each is typical,” notes Carinda. “People sometimes start to see improvements within the first session, but really turn the corner by about the fourth session.”

Anthony's voice grew stronger, and he now sings solos in his church choir. “I don't get hoarse and my voice is fuller,” he reports.

“I thought it was the greatest thing,” he says about treatment from Dr. Shah and Carinda. “It definitely helped me.”

FHCN article by Susan Hemmingway. Photo by Jordan Pysz.



Devang M. Shah, MD, is board certified in otolaryngology. After receiving his undergraduate degree in electrical engineering at MIT, he worked at Hewlett Packard Medical Products Division in Boston. He then attended Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey and completed his otolaryngology residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore. Dr. Shah is a member of the

American Academy of Otolaryngology — Head & Neck Surgery and has served Central Florida since 1997. He currently teaches medical students as a Clinical Assistant Professor at Florida State University College of Medicine, Daytona Beach regional campus.

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