

Strategies for **Improving** **Communication** with Patients who are **Deaf or Hard of Hearing** in Primary and Secondary Care.

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Clinical Medicine



Nine Million People in the UK are deaf or hard of hearing.

That's 1 in 7 people in the UK.



Hearing and Listening

Aim to understand the.....

- experiences of health care
- suggestions for improving care

....of patients who are
deaf and hard-of-hearing



So how do you find out what deaf patients need?

You ask them.



The Project:

- A Student Selected Component
- 4th Year medical students
- 4 week 'immersion' project
 - Level 1 British Sign Language Training
 - Deaf communication awareness lectures
 - Deaf cultural events (e.g. 'Deaf Club')
- Working with 'Cambridge Deaf Association'



Aims

- To understand and evaluate the health care experience of patients who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- To explore what they feel would improve their access to, or quality of, medical care.
- To develop a communication tool, in conjunction with the deaf community, that can help hearing doctors to meet the needs of their deaf patients.



Method

- Mixed questionnaire
 - Involving free text and set questions
 - Covered health care experiences and suggestions
- Distributed via ‘Cambridge Deaf Association’
- Given out manually, with a BSL explanation
- Twenty questionnaires completed.



What is the experience of Deaf Patients with Health Care?



“The hospital has a good understanding of the difficulties in communication that deafness causes.”

“I am satisfied with the deaf communication services available in the NHS”

10 Agreed, 10 Disagreed



“I knew that I could request a BSL interpreter for medical consultations””

“It is a legal requirement for hospitals to provide access to BSL interpreters”

HOWEVER, in practice, very few respondents had been able to access these services.

18/20 Agreed



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The Reality:

“When I have been to the hospital / to my GPs, they are able to offer me services to improve communication (loop systems, BSL interpreters...)”

10 Agreed, 10 Disagreed



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What Communication Help have you been Offered?

- 1 / 20 : Friend
- 5 / 20 : Interpreter
- 14 / 20 : No translation service offered



How does deafness affect patient interaction with healthcare?



How Does Communication Affect Health Care for Deaf Patients?

- 9 of 20 respondents said they **avoid hospitals or GPs** because they worry about communication problems
- 10 of 20 respondents had **not taken prescribed medication, or taken it incorrectly**, because of difficulty in understanding instructions.



Mistrust

Fear

Frustration

Misunderstanding

Dangerous



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How can we change this?



What is Needed?

- A way of letting *doctors know what they can do* to improve their communication with patients who are deaf/hard of hearing
- This must be
 - Readily accessible
 - Universally-applicable
 - Applicable to primary and secondary care



The Idea: A Quick Reference Card

- Containing suggestions for techniques to improve communication with deaf patients.
- Written *by* the Deaf Community *for* doctors.
- To be displayed on hospital wards and in GP consulting rooms.



The Response from the Deaf Community:

- Felt doctors were ‘doing their best’ but that it was still not meeting their needs.
- Overwhelmingly positive response to the idea of a ‘**Quick Reference Card**’ of techniques for communicating with deaf patients.



The Quick Reference Card

- Communicating with **lip-reading** patients.
- Communicating with **hard-of-hearing** patients.
- Communicating with **British Sign Language** Users.



COMMUNICATION WITH LIP-READING OR HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS

- ASK THEM WHAT THEIR PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION IS (BSL, lipreading, aural)
- Sit closer to the patient, and directly in front of them. Pick a well-lit, quiet area.
- **Attract the person's attention** before speaking.



COMMUNICATION WITH LIP-READING OR HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS

- **Don't shout** or cover your mouth. Speak **clearly** but not too slowly.
- Do not exaggerate lip movements - this makes it harder for people to lip read.
- If the patient doesn't understand you, **rephrase** the information rather than just repeating it.



COMMUNICATION WITH LIP-READING OR HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS

- **Recap** often to check understanding, especially diagnoses, & medication information
- Use **simple language**. Avoid using medical terms and words the patient won't be familiar with.
- Be patient - lip-reading or using an interpreter may take longer than usual consultations



COMMUNICATING WITH HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS.

- If the patient uses hearing aids, but is still struggling to hear, **check that the hearing aid is working.**
- The Audiology department in hospitals can check and repair hearing aids.
- Hearing aids do not give the patient 'normal' hearing, & are hard to use when there is background noise



COMMUNICATING WITH HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS.

- **‘Loop System’ may be an affordable solution for some practice.** The Loop System is designed to amplify voices and ***can be used with or without hearing aids.***
- Audiology Department can lend out Loop Systems for hospital stays or visits.



COMMUNICATING WITH BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) USERS.

- British Sign Language (BSL) is not ‘gestured’ English - it is a different language, with different grammar. For many Deaf BSL users, English is a second or third language.
- ***Writing things down is NOT IDEAL, but is better than not communicating at all.***
- *Sign Language Interpreters are a legal requirement, and should be offered to all BSL users.*



COMMUNICATING WITH BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) USERS.

- When using an interpreter, **talk directly to the patient**, not to the interpreter.
- Be flexible with appointment dates and times, and book as far in advance as possible.
- Clarion BSL Interpreters: **Tel (voice) 01223 870840 or 01223 873341**



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•COMMUNICATING WITH HARD-OF-HEARING PATIENTS.

- Your ward may have a 'Red Box' which contains a '**Loop System**'. The Loop System is designed to amplify voices and **can be used with or without hearing aids**.
- If your ward does not have a Loop System, the Audiology Department can lend one to you.**
- If the patient uses hearing aids, but is still struggling to hear, **check that the hearing aid is working.**
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What do the Deaf Community think about the 'Quick Reference Card?'



“I think using this card would speed-up getting effective communication between doctors and Deaf patients”

“The card should be in an easily visible place on all hospital wards”

20/20 Agreed



“It is important to me to know how I / the hospital could contact an interpreter or audiology quickly and easily”

“I would like there to be a similar card for GP practices”

“The card is useful and should be available in to the Deaf Community”

19/20 Agreed



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“I would feel more comfortable seeing my GP / going to hospital, if I knew that they were more ‘deaf aware’.”

17/20 Agreed



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Please take a copy of the “Quick Reference Card’ back with you to your practice!

For more information, or additional copies of the Quick Reference Card, please contact:

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