

## Deaf Awareness and Communication Tactics

Don't assume that the person you are speaking to can hear as well as you!

It is estimated that the NHS can lose up to **£20million** a year because of poor communication when patients fail to hear the instructions and appointments offered them. Poor communication also increases the risks to the patient and professionals of a misunderstanding over clinical advice. Good communication is important for patient dignity – patients with hearing loss often talk about the lack of dignity in being shouted at.

There have been many incidents where mishearing has caused great distress for people for example:  
**28%** of deaf or hard of hearing people found it difficult to get appointments in the NHS  
**24%** had missed an appointment, not being able to hear staff calling out their name  
**19%** said that they had missed more than five appointments!  
**42%** found it difficult to communicate with staff  
**35%** were left unclear about their condition or diagnosis  
**33%** of profoundly deaf patients had taken the wrong dose of medication  
(RNID Report 2004 – 'A Simple Cure')

You do not have to have a hearing loss in order to not get the message.

Here are a few simple rules for good communication;

- **Attract the attention of the person you wish to speak to.**
- **Face the person you are talking to.**
- **Sit or stand with the light on your face.**
- **Sit if the person you are talking to is sitting or stand if they are standing. Eye to eye contact is important.**
- **If possible move away from background noise.**
- **Repeat or rephrase when asked.**
- **If necessary you may have to write things down.**
- **Speak slowly with a calm voice.**
- **Introduce the topic you are going to talk about first.**
- **Refrain from speaking with your mouth full.**
- **Avoid raising your voice as this will distort your lip-patterns.**
- **Keep your face and mouth clear.**
- **Ensure written information is provided on medication for deaf patients**

'Good communication creates a meaningful and trusting relationship between healthcare professionals and their patients, this is accepted as fundamental to effective patient care'.  
(BMA Report Nov 2004 )

Communication Support can be booked through a number of providers, RNID Wales, North Wales Deaf Association, British Deaf Association and Wales Council for the Deaf.

### References

- BMA Report 2004** 'Communication Skills Education for Doctors: update <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3527099>
- Reeves, D., Kokoruwe, B., Dobbins, J., & Newton, V. (2002)** *Access to Primary Care and Accident and Emergency Services for Deaf People in the North West; A Report for the NHS Executive North West Research and Development Directorate*.
- RNID Report 2004** 'A Simple Cure' [www.rnid.org.uk/Content.aspx?id=84925&ciid=344110](http://www.rnid.org.uk/Content.aspx?id=84925&ciid=344110)
- Adam-Spink (2004)** *NHS 'Failing' Deaf Patients*.