

Approaching and Communicating with Patients and Clients

- A Hearing Impaired Person

Hearing Impairment - Some Definitions

The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disability as:

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

A **hearing impairment** may mean a person has no hearing at all, has hearing loss at a particular range of frequencies or has tinnitus (noise in the ears). It may be congenital or acquired and may affect speech or language development if it occurs early in life.

A deaf person may use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language. This is a language with its own grammar constructions which are different from English. An individual may have some difficulties communicating effectively in written language but may be a very good communicator in BSL. If a deaf person is accompanied by an interpreter you should speak directly to the deaf person. However, not all deaf people will know or use sign language. Many deaf people will use lip-reading when you are communicating with them.

A Hearing Impaired Person

- Visit in a distraction-free environment with as little background noise as possible and make sure that any available light is shining on your face.
- Introduce yourself and speak in a slow clear voice facing the person and at eye level and don't shout.
- Use gestures, facial expressions, body language and touch to facilitate understanding.
- Never abruptly begin a conversation – first get the person’s attention by facing them.
- Carry a pen and paper, as a hearing impaired person may prefer this method of communication.
- The use of basic finger spelling may be an option.
- If you can, have a look at the web site www.hearingdogs.org.uk for further guidance.

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