



Health service providers are slowly opening their ears to the calls from deaf patients for a better bedside manner.

By Spencer Clark
Director of DAT

By recognising the difficulties faced by both deaf patients and hearing staff, organisations are striving for an easier way to deal with deaf patients – by improving *their* personal communication skills with essential training.

com·mu·ni·ca·tion *n.*

1. The act of communicating; transmission.
 - a. The exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behavior.
 - b. Interpersonal rapport.

Have you ever been with a patient, employer or colleague and found communicating a near impossible task? So much so you even consider asking the question - 'are we actually speaking the same language?' Working in the health service requires 'speaking the same language' as an essential part of the job. From a patient making an appointment through to explaining a diagnosis or collecting a prescription, talking and listening is vital. Have you considered what these experiences are like when the patient is deaf?

Nearly 9 million people in the UK have some form of deafness, but many hearing people who have never met a deaf person before admit they would not really know how to communicate with them adequately.

"As a deaf person I experience day to day difficulties with communicating with some hearing people" says Lucy Blake, co-founder of DAT (Deaf Awareness

Training). "There have been many times when I have been sat in a waiting room and my name has been called out over the loud speaker, but being deaf I don't hear it. I always tell the receptionist that I am deaf so they can let me know when it's my turn, but this doesn't always happen, I have been left there and missed my appointment, to both my doctors and my frustration." This is just one experience of Lucy's life without hearing.



**Sorry,
NO DEAF
ACCESS**

"There are situations when it's important for me to have a clear understanding of what's happening, particularly in a doctors or dentists, but it is also important for the person I am speaking with to understand me, good communication is after all a two-way thing."

Both deaf and hearing people can get frustrated when communicating becomes difficult, especially in stressful situations when trying to get important information across. Repetition, long exchanges of misinformation and a sense of not getting anywhere can be embarrassing for everyone involved and doesn't lend itself to a happy patient experience.

There are different types of deafness and depending on the deaf individual there are different ways of communicating. Some sign, some lip read, some use written words and some use a mixture of all. The point is *there is not one solution* to communicate with all deaf people.

Lucy explains how understanding the basic needs of someone who is deaf can result in a positive experience, "I've taught deaf awareness to some of the staff at my local dental practice, they know me quite well now and always greet me with a smile, they know a bit of signing but most importantly they know other ways to communicate with me clearly and now the experience is fantastic, I don't miss my appointment calls and they take a little time to explain what is going to happen, whether it's just a check up or something that requires more work. They also know to text me on my mobile as I can't use a normal telephone. Simple things like this make all the difference."

A life time of experiencing difficulties as a deaf person in a hearing world has led Lucy to set up DAT to raise the awareness of deaf patients and train staff in essential communication skills. "We've made a positive start at improving the deaf patient experience, as our bespoke workshop sessions are led by a deaf person

they are a great way for staff to become immediately more confident in communicating with deaf people. Our relaxed and practical sessions have inspired many people to then go on to learn British Sign Language at local colleges." Through a one-day DAT workshop trainees learn about the many aspects of deafness including the essential practical skills that make a real difference in their day to day jobs. The demand for deaf awareness courses is growing, Lucy and the team at DAT are looking forward to a busy 2008.



Using text messaging to contact deaf patients is just one small and easy step that can make a huge difference.

Find out more at www.deafawarenesstraining.com or call **0845 466 7153** to make a booking or for free advice on how easily you can raise your deaf awareness standards.

