

How to support people with hearing loss

A guide for GP practice staff

Patient Online and Action on Hearing Loss



Organisation

Action on Hearing Loss, representing people with hearing loss.

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Information about people with hearing loss

Around 11 million people have hearing loss in the UK – that is about one in every six people. About 900,000 of those people have severe or profound levels of hearing loss. More than 70% of people over 70 years old have some level of hearing loss and now that people are living longer, more people will have hearing loss in future. We estimate that by 2035 there will be around 15.3 million people with hearing loss – that is one in every five people. Government information from 2011 tells us that about 24,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language (BSL) as their main language, but the real number is probably higher.

It is important to remember that some people with hearing loss may also have an additional sight impairment, learning disability or autism. There are 358,000 people in the UK who have a combined sight and hearing impairment, and prevalence of hearing and sight loss is much higher for those with learning disabilities. This may mean that you will need to adapt how you communicate with people who have these conditions.

Needs of people with hearing loss

Many people with hearing loss find it difficult or impossible to use the telephone so it is good to offer them other ways of getting in touch like text messaging, text relay, text phone or online services. It is best to ask each person what their communication needs are and what support they need.

People who use BSL might not have English as their first or preferred language. This shows how important it is for information on websites to be in plain English, so that it is easier for everyone to understand. Videos must have subtitles to read, and ideally there should also be BSL video translations of important information. This includes policy documents, and instructions on how to make a complaint.

How practices can help people with hearing loss

The option to book appointments, order repeat prescriptions or get test results online can help people with hearing loss contact their GP if they cannot use the telephone. To help people with hearing loss contact their GP when they need to, practices can also offer the following options:



Email

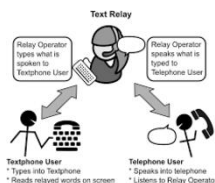


SMS text



Textphone

a telephone with a keyboard and display screen that uses typed messages



Text relay

typed messages are sent to another caller via an operator



Video relay

a service where a conversation goes through a BSL interpreter using video

When putting information online, practices should:

- Use short paragraphs or bullet points
- Avoid using long descriptions, jargon or difficult text
- Use pictures or photos to help explain important points.

When producing online videos and when making information available in BSL, GPs should make sure:

- Information is easy to understand
- Subtitles are used
- Videos and BSL video translations have good picture quality.



A BSL translation company should be able to provide advice for BSL videos. For more information, please visit www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/bslonline

Support for practice staff

Many people with hearing loss find it difficult or impossible to use the telephone. Online services can make it easier for them to book an appointment, order repeat prescriptions or get test results. Many people still do not know about online services, so staff should make sure they let people know. This is really important for people with hearing loss as online services are a great option if you cannot use the telephone.

To make sure that information is accessible to people with hearing loss, ask them how they would like to receive information and the easiest way to share information with you.

People who use BSL may need extra help getting online services. Information about online services needs to be written in plain English so it is easy to understand. BSL videos will help support the Deaf community to use online services. Practices should work with the Deaf community to get feedback on materials and information and to raise awareness of online services.