

A Guide for Effective Communication in Health Care

Providers

This Guide will help health care providers establish and maintain best practices in ensuring *effective communication* for hard of hearing and deaf patients, families, and caregivers. Hospital administrators, risk managers, and chief regulatory officers of hospitals, health care facilities, and private practices, and all members of the health care team, should read this Guide to ensure compliance with laws, regulations, and guidelines related to the provision of services for effective communication.

Effective communication is the process of exchanging information between two or more people and asking for clarification until all parties are able to fully understand. Effective communication results in the patient being able to make informed decisions and the health care team providing safe and responsible care.

This Guide includes information on:

- Important facts about people who are hard of hearing or deaf.
- Legal and regulatory responsibilities for hospitals and health care practices and facilities in providing access to effective communication.
- The Communication Access Plan (CAP) and how it can help providers and patients manage and ensure effective communication.
- Communication aids and services needed for effective communication.
- Information for staff working in the emergency department, inpatient settings, and outpatient settings, as well as performing tests and procedures.

Research supports that effective communication between patients, families, and their health care providers can have a significant impact on a patient's health and well-being. Costs associated with the provision of aids and services to ensure access to communication can be mitigated by reducing:

- Length of stay
- Readmission rates
- Emergency room visits
- Unnecessary diagnostic tests
- Medication errors

Effective communication improves the quality of treatment, resulting in:

- Improved patient safety
- Informed decision making
- Treatment and medication adherence
- Increased patient satisfaction
- Better health care outcomes

The majority of people in the United States who are hard of hearing or deaf do not use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary or preferred language, and yet sign language interpreting services are typically what are offered by hospitals and other health care facilities. These services do not meet the communication needs and rights of non-signing people who are hard of hearing or deaf.

Institutions and practices increase their liability by being non-compliant with federal, state, and local laws as well as standards and guidelines set forth by accrediting agencies such as The Joint Commission (TJC), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Office of Minority Health (OMH).

References

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