

Communication in Inpatient Settings

Providers

Establishing and maintaining best practices to support effective communication is essential for the delivery of safe and exemplary care.

Creating and sustaining an environment that promotes equal access to communication for hard of hearing and deaf patients, families, and caregivers is also the legal responsibility of hospitals, institutions, practices, and facilities.

Patients must clearly and completely understand all aspects of their treatment to fully participate in their health care and make informed decisions.

When the patient arrives:

- Ask if they have a printed **Communication Access Plan (CAP)**. If not, complete one with the patient and include it in the EMR or paper chart.
- Inform patient of available aids and services provided by the facility. (Refer to *Communication Aids and Services* in the Provider section of this Guide for more information.)
- Be sure all staff is aware of patient's communication needs and that appropriate services are provided.
- Ask if patient has hearing aids, cochlear implants, or other Assistive Listening Devices. Provide container with patient's name for safe keeping.
- Place a universal "hearing loss" sticker on existing wristband or provide an additional wristband designating hearing status.
- Ask patient's permission to post a printed sign indicating they are hard of hearing or deaf.
- Make sure there is a plan including the use of visual alerts in case of emergencies. Provide other devices for visual alerts as needed.
- Post a note on the intercom at the nursing station indicating patient's hearing status. Remind staff that patient will not hear or understand staff speaking to them on the intercom.
- If available, offer patient a bed near a window for greater visual stimulation and to reduce isolation.

To ensure effective communication at bedside:

- When communicating with the patient:
 - Establish eye contact before speaking
 - Give your name and discipline, and show your ID badge
- Use a smartphone, tablet, dry erase board, or pen and paper as backup to verbal discussion.

- Ask patients how best to get their attention:
 - Turning lights on and off
 - Standing where they can see you and gesturing
 - Tapping them gently on the shoulder (especially helpful when patient is asleep)
- Conduct all discussions directly with the patient and not family members, friends, or caregivers. This is in compliance with HIPAA regulations as well as patient-centered care.
- Use teach-back to ensure patient understanding.
- Provide instruction for setting up captioning on the TV.
- Provide captioned educational and recreational videos.

Refer to *Communicating with Hard of Hearing and Deaf Patients* in the Provider section of this Guide for more information.

Transporting patient for tests or procedures:

- Transport/escort staff should be aware of patient’s hearing status and know how best to communicate. This is particularly important because the transporter/escort is always behind the patient.
- Be sure communication aids accompany the patient.

Preparing patient for discharge:

- Use teach-back to confirm patient’s understanding.
- Provide printed discharge instructions.
- Refer to the CAP to determine how you will communicate for any follow- up.