

WEBINAR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Title: Making Eyecare Accessible

Presenter: Maryna Hura

- 1 I have a patient booked in tomorrow, mentally he is very aware but his best vision is light reflex and his best hearing level is 110dB so he can't lip read or use sign language. His wife is also registered as severely partially sighted with a profound hearing loss and his son does not know how to communicate with them. He has ALDs but due to the profound loss communication is still difficult. How would you suggest communicating with this patient?

I think this was answered on the day of the webinar.

In situations such as this we would probably need to rely on relatives and/or carers. One would assume that their son would have established some form of personal and unique method of communication, unless he was not brought up by his parents. A more tactile method would probably be appropriate here, although I am not really an expert in the field of such complex communication needs.

- 2 Is it a legal requirement for us to book an interpreter if one is required or does the patient have to provide?

It is a legal requirement for us to make reasonable adjustments, whereby booking an interpreter may well be such an adjustment.

If a patient requests an interpreter but the practice is unable to provide such service, it may be necessary to be prepared to justify the reasoning behind this decision, if after their visit the patient feels that their needs have not been met and decides to complain.

- 3 The funding of interpreters isn't very clear. Is there an expectation for the practice to pay if local funding isn't available?

I agree, it is a postcode lottery, really. If a patient insists on having an interpreter, we need to remember that it is their right to have one present during an eye examination/dispense, whenever there is important information being discussed (health, money, legal etc.).

Every patient is different and some may well be happy if someone in practice could sign, even at a basic level, together with the use of appropriate technology and visual aids. However, this would need to be established prior to the visit.

It could be argued that, in some cases, the cost of booking an interpreter for a couple of hours is not justifiable against the NHS (or even private) sight test fee, in which case the practice would need to be ready to provide evidence to demonstrate that every step was taken in order to meet the patient needs using alternative methods of communication, thus the legal requirement of providing reasonable adjustments was met.

Unfortunately, having an NHS contract does not automatically provide optical practices with access to the NHS central fund.

- 4 Who is responsible for paying an interpreter? Is NHS funding available and how?

As above.

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- 5 We book and pay for a sign language interpreter for our deaf patients. Is this not common practice? It makes the test easier and allows for the patients to have all their questions answered. Where, do you stand if a deaf px declines an interpreter, but you are worried about their understanding of what you are explaining to them?

I think this was answered on the day.

I would be curious to know why a Deaf customer may decline an interpreter. If this is the case, the practice team should utilise their skills and knowledge from a Deaf awareness course to ensure that patient leaves the practice with a clear understanding of what was discussed during their visit.

Appropriate use of technology, easy read material and visual aids, together with patience from staff, should offer a sound solution to this.

- 6 Also, if someone turns up and communication is not possible for some reason I.E the interpreter has not turned up, can we rebook for another time, or would that be classed as discrimination against the patient?

This would need to be discussed with each individual patient on the day; it would not be advisable to re-book an appointment without offering an explanation or discussing it with them first.

- 7 Are there recommended courses/resources to begin learning some BSL?

From personal experience:

[Teach Me Sign | British Sign Language Courses](#)
[Signworld \(signworldlearn.com\)](http://Signworld (signworldlearn.com))

Make sure you check the provider's credentials, i.e. if they are approved by one of the recognised awarding bodies, such as Signature.

- 8 Where would you recommend going if you do want to learn BSL?

First, I would explore your local area and find out whether there is a Deaf club, a charity, a community centre or an educational establishment which may offer BSL courses (I did my Level 1 at Bradford College).

In the absence of a F2F provision, online courses are a great alternative.

- 9 Where can we learn IS sign language?

This is not something I have explored personally, but there are some online resources available.

- 10 Which type of sign language is used the most worldwide?

American Sign Language (ASL)

- 11 Do you feel that the GOC, ABDO etc should offer courses in BSL, if so, how can this be something we can introduce, especially as we are all healthcare providers who work with the d/Deaf community?

I would love to say yes. It would be fantastic if we, as an industry, could demonstrate a truly inclusive approach to person-centred care and break down the communication barriers.

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- 12 Once you learn and do a course, do you need to update your qualifications every so often?
Once you have BSL Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 or higher qualifications, there is no need to update them – it is the same as having GCSEs or A-Levels. However, as with any language, it is advisable to find a way to keep practising your signing skills.
- 13 Why is sign language not taught in nursery and primary schools?
Up until April 2022, BSL did not have a legal status in England, Scotland and Wales. Now, that it is a legally recognised language, BSL is set to be taught as a GCSE subject in schools from 2025.
- 14 Do children who are deaf primarily use Makaton? I've heard about it, but not sure on the main details of if/why this is true?
Makaton is not a language, but a communication support programme. Deaf children should be taught BSL and integrate in the Deaf community to help them establish a strong Deaf identity. If a child has a learning disability, as well as hearing impairment, Makaton may be an easier alternative.
- This is a difficult question to answer, as many Deaf children are born to hearing parents. Some families may not have access to BSL courses or, for whatever reason, choose not to teach their children to sign at all.*
- 15 If so, few Deaf people know BSL which is the best sign language to learn? My children watch a character called Mr Tumble who speaks Makaton and I've picked up a few words, is this a language worth pursuing?
As above. Makaton is not a language.
- BSL is a fully developed language used by over 150,000 people in the UK, 87,000 of whom are d/Deaf.*
- 16 Is Makaton something that could be used for patients with dementia, with limited speech?
Makaton could be easily taught to both children and adults, although this is not something I have previously looked into. It would be interesting to find out if there is some evidence to support this idea.
- 17 Is Makaton useful?
It is very useful when communicating with babies and young children.
- 18 Is there an App that "translates" from speech that you can recommend?
Not clear – translates to what? Writing or BSL? Not sure how useful such an app would be for written messages; we might as well use pen and paper.
- If the question is about translating to BSL – I am not aware of any free apps yet, but it doesn't mean that something like this is not being developed as we speak, especially with the advancements in AI.*
- 19 Do sound to text apps work in place of signing?
Written word cannot really replace BSL, as English is often not the first/preferred language for many Deaf people.

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- 20 What basic signs would you recommend learning? What would be most useful? What is you're welcome in sign and also please take a seat?

Greeting signs, numbers, days of the week, fingerspelling to spell name/surname or names of medication.

For optometrists – consider learning some of the common words/phrases used during a typical eye test. For dispensing opticians – the same, but with respect to frame/lens choices and money.

These can be found within the Professional Development Toolbox under Webinars 2023 & 2024. The video is called Examples of Sign Language and is just the section at the end of the webinar where Maryna ran through some examples with us.