



# GP & DEAF PATIENT SURVEY

Report by Access Bedford

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*65% of respondents in the GP survey do not know what the  
Accessible Information Standard Policy (2016) is.*

*70% of respondents in the Deaf Patient Survey 'make do' without an interpreter  
(gesture, writing things down or use a family member)*

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# Access Bedford

## GP and Deaf Patient Surveys 2021

### Overview:

Access Bedford have been made aware of regular incidents of communication breakdown between patients and their GP/GP surgery, this information has come to us via the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community through our Deaf Space drop-in service and through our social media channels.

Access Bedford wanted to identify where the breakdowns were so that we can work with Health services and the Deaf community to ensure that both GP's and patients understand how to support surgeries to commit to their legal obligations under the Accessible Information Standard policy (2016)

We compiled two surveys, one to be completed by D/deaf and Hard of Hearing patients and the other by GP surgeries. To make the patient survey accessible we created BSL Videos to go with the written English questions.

### Responses:

Both surveys achieved a low response rate  
34 from the GP Survey  
27 from the Patient Survey

### Conclusion:

In an ideal situation we would have responses from all GP surgeries and from all front facing staff in those surgeries. To provide an accurate comparison of responses, it would have been good to match up responses from the D/deaf people and the surgeries they use. As it turned out we ended up with a mismatch of surgeries and patients and also variations in the roles of the staff responding which has meant that we are unable to draw any firm conclusions by surgery.

We can however conclude that awareness amongst the professional respondents of the Accessible Information Standard is very low. Knowledge of the individual communication methods of D/deaf patients is erratic and we should be concerned about a lack of privacy when family members are used as main contacts and / or as ways to communicate with the patient in appointments. Family members include parents and siblings but also, more concerning, children (we know this anecdotally outside this survey)

### Action following this survey for all health care professionals:

Mandatory and universal training on the Accessibility Information Standard for all existing patient facing staff and also to be built into inductions for new starters as a matter of priority.

Mandatory and universal training on how to book Sign Language Interpreters either live or remotely, for all existing patient facing staff and also to be built into inductions for new starters as a matter of priority.

Face to face meetings with all patients to establish individual communication requirements, and how the patient should be contacted in order to follow the Accessible Information Standard requirements. This must be flagged in a way that is clear enough to be followed every time without exception.

## The Deaf Patient Experience

Patient experience - transcribed from a BSL video 14/02/21.

Hi, so its 14 February 2021, and well I'm not sure of the time!

Just now the GP has been trying to ring me; they kept ringing so I was worried it must be something important. I thought they may be checking about my vaccine. I went upstairs and asked my son to answer- he is 15 and he had to translate the call and talk to the GP for me. It was about my inhaler, and they said they would send me a letter with an appointment for my asthma check. So that was all fine.

This morning I have been online to fill out the form and send it to them. It asked if I had eczema, so I was confused about what they were asking.

I asked why they wanted to call, because my son was there, I didn't want him to overhear anything private, he is only 15. They said, 'oh no, it's not private, it's only about your inhaler'. That's fine, but what if it had been private. What if they were letting me know I have Cancer and my son doesn't know? If he overheard, I'd be furious. Maybe Access Bedford could teach GP surgeries about Sign Live communication.

## Patient experience - transcribed from a BSL video 19/03/21.

I have some negative feedback I like to share. Recently I was ill and wanted to contact the GP, so I used Sign Live. The doctor said they would call back via Sign Live between 3 and 5pm, which meant I had to be looking at my phone constantly during that time; they didn't give me a specific time, for example saying they would call at 4:15 so I knew to look at my phone then. I just had to spend 3 hours checking my phone!

So, my experience in trying to contact the GP is not good. They said they would use Sign Live, but later that afternoon my phone started ringing with a number I didn't know. I ignored the call, but they kept ringing. On about the 4<sup>th</sup> time I answered and used my voice to tell them that I'm Deaf and couldn't hear them. They phoned straight back so I had to take the phone up to my son to talk to them. It was the doctor. When my son explained that they needed to use Sign Live, the doctor asked, 'What's that?!' It felt like they weren't bothered that I am Deaf. I feel that on my record it should be at the top that I am Deaf and need communication to be through Sign Live, maybe with an explanation of how Sign Live works.

That appointment was cancelled, which made me quite angry. I made a new appointment, and it was the same thing again I would be contacted between 1 and 4pm, which meant I had to focus on my phone all afternoon. But they did then phone through Sign Live which was great, it meant I could communicate using BSL, and the interpreter could sign to me what the doctor was saying.

However, I do think it is quite rare for GP surgeries and clinics to be Deaf aware, and to have things like Sign Live, so I feel like we need to campaign and let them know how to communicate with Deaf people. Communication is just one problem, but it is an important one!

I do have a range of illnesses which mean I regularly visit Addenbrookes hospital. They're fantastic, they have a computer ready with zoom for video calls when I need to contact them. Bedford don't have anything. They should use Cambridge as an example. I'm not sure why the local area is like this - possibly it's about funding, I don't know.

Communication with the GP is so important. Usually, I have to ignore their calls which means things get delayed. When I contacted Addenbrookes because my eczema had become much worse, they got me an appointment there straight away. They always use sign live. They checked that I could drive myself there, let me know about wearing a mask and regular handwashing, checked I didn't have any symptoms of Coronavirus and then I could go. When arrived they had an interpreter there

## Patient experience - received by email 19/03/21.

My Husband got a letter on 13.03.2021 informing him that the GP has been trying to call him. He rang the surgery on 15.03.2021 to discuss the letter. The lady who answered the phone informed me that there was no mention of my deafness on the Home Page. I informed her that this is the same excuse over and over again with them saying it is on the system or they will do this but clearly, they are not. This was related to an email and a photo of a mole that was sent on 1.02.2021.

The lady I spoke to refused to accept that I cannot hear on the phone or make an appointment with me. I don't know what she does not understand about the word DEAF but clearly she kept saying the GP will phone me to discuss and make an appointment as she cannot do this. I asked her when the GP will call me and she said she could not tell me and she is not allowed to make appointments. She kept saying the GP will ring me, again I had to repeat that I am profoundly deaf and she still said the same thing but got louder and ruder each time. I explained that I would need a BSL interpreter which she said it was my responsibility not hers. She also said that why could I not bring the one that was supporting the call. I told her it was the law and She then went off line and came back and said the same thing and then she either hung up or cut me off after 21 minutes. I rang again but this time I spoke to another lady who did her best. She did say that she cannot book the appointment as the GP needs to speak to me to arrange this. I told her this appointment needs to be face to face as the GP has seen a photo of the mole. She said she was not allowed to book and said that the procedures was the GP now does this. In the end they agreed to email me the appointment. I made it very clear that I need a BSL interpreter, and it is the law that the surgery follows this to help me with the appointment.

I received an email from the surgery via my wife and we agreed for the appointment on 22.03.2021 and an interpreter was booked. I arrived for my appointment and it was very clear that there was no interpreter booked. I showed the receptionist the email I received, and she was SO uncomfortable she was faffing around trying to look busy. It was very clear that they had not rang anyone because they did not say anything or inform me that one had been booked and possibly not arrived or anything like that. I did see the GP who did not take her mask off, where is the reasonable adjustment for me to lipread if I had wanted to. We communicated by paper which was ok and when I picked the paper to take home she was not happy for me to do this. I told her that I have the right to take the paper home to show my wife to explain the appointment. The GP used words that I don't understand, lesion but we manage to get by. I wanted more information on what the mole was but did not have the opportunity to. It felt like she wanted the appointment to be hurried. I wanted some information on how I can get my skin tag removed as it is large and bothering me as catching on my boxer short again no chance to discuss this. Clearly this is a breach of my rights to have access to full information that I would have wanted. I felt very uncomfortable and now I want to change GP as I have never had an interpreter at any of my appointments despite me telling them over and over again that I am DEAF.

This email has been written for me by my wife as her English is better than mine and I want this to be clear to whoever receives this understand the word DEAF means I cannot hear so please don't phone me and stop using the excuse that it is not on the HOME PAGE.

I am aware that Access Bedford has written to the surgery asking for some answers and look forward to the response as I will be considering further action of poor practice, discrimination and the law being broken. I also want to raise that having a call centre is not the answer for DEAF people as it needs a person who is fully deaf aware and can book appointment on the spot for deaf patients.