

Supporting Communication Needs of Service Users

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The aim of this guidance is to ensure that disabled patients / service users and, where appropriate, carers and parents, receive information in formats that they can understand, and that they receive appropriate support to help them to communicate.

This will enable effective and accurate dialogue between a professional and a service user to take place so that people access services appropriately and independently, and make decisions about their health, wellbeing, care and treatment.

This guidance supports staff in identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents, where those needs relate to a disability, impairment or sensory loss, for example people who have aphasia, autism or a mental health condition which affects their ability to communicate. This includes, but is not limited to, people who are blind or have some visual loss, people who are d/Deaf, deafblind or have some hearing loss and people with a learning disability.

There are five basic steps which staff must consider while communicating with the service users. For example when sending referral letters, arranging meetings or appointments or conducting patient assessment:

1. **Ask:** identify / find out if an individual has any communication / information needs relating to a disability or sensory loss and if so what they are.
2. **Record:** record those needs in a clear, unambiguous and standardised way in electronic and / or paper based record / administrative systems / documents.
3. **Alert / flag / highlight:** ensure that recorded needs are 'highly visible' whenever the individuals' record is accessed, and prompt for action.
4. **Share:** include information about individuals' information / communication needs as part of existing data sharing processes (and following existing information governance frameworks).
5. **Act:** take steps to ensure that individuals receive information which they can access and understand, and receive communication support if they need it.

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Term / abbreviation	What it stands for
Advocate	A person who supports someone who may otherwise find it difficult to communicate or to express their point of view. Advocates can support people to make choices, ask questions and to say what they think.
Accessible information	Information which is able to be read or received and understood by the individual or group for which it is intended.
Alternative format	Information provided in an alternative to standard printed or handwritten English, for example large print, braille or email.
Braille	A tactile reading format used by people who are blind, deafblind or who have some visual loss. Readers use their fingers to 'read' or identify raised dots representing letters and numbers. Although originally intended (and still used) for the purpose of information being documented on paper, braille can now be used as a digital aid to conversation, with some smartphones offering braille displays. Refreshable braille displays for computers also enable braille users to read emails and documents.
British Sign Language (BSL)	BSL is a visual-gestural language that is the first or preferred language of many d/Deaf people and some deafblind people; it has its own grammar and principles, which differ from English.
BSL interpreter	A person skilled in interpreting between BSL and English. A type of communication support which may be needed by a person who is d/Deaf or deafblind.
Communication support	Support which is needed to enable effective, accurate dialogue between a professional and a service user to take place.
Communication tool / communication aid	A tool, device or document used to support effective communication with a disabled person. They may be generic or specific / bespoke to an individual. They often use symbols and / or pictures. They range from a simple paper chart to complex computer-aided or electronic devices.
d/Deaf	A person who identifies as being deaf with a lowercase d is indicating that they have a significant hearing impairment. Many deaf people have lost their hearing later in life and as such may be able to speak and / or read English to the same extent as a hearing person. A person who identifies as being Deaf with an uppercase D is indicating that they are culturally Deaf and belong to the Deaf community. Most Deaf people are sign language users who have been deaf all of their lives. For most Deaf people, English is a second language and as such they may have a limited ability to read, write or speak English.
Deafblind	The Policy guidance Care and Support for Deafblind Children and Adults (Department of Health, 2014) states that, "The generally accepted definition of Deafblindness is that

	persons are regarded as Deafblind “if their combined sight and hearing impairment causes difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility. This includes people with a progressive sight and hearing loss” (Think Dual Sensory, Department of Health, 1995).”
Disability	The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as follows, “A person (P) has a disability if — (a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and (b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.” This term also has an existing Data Dictionary definition .
Disabled people	Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has the following definition, “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”
Easy read	Written information in an ‘easy read’ format in which straightforward words and phrases are used supported by pictures, diagrams, symbols and / or photographs to aid understanding and to illustrate the text.
Impairment	The Equality and Human Rights Commission defines impairment as, “A functional limitation which may lead to a person being defined as disabled...”
Interpreter	A person able to transfer meaning from one spoken or signed language into another signed or spoken language.
Large print	Printed information enlarged or otherwise reformatted to be provided in a larger font size. A form of accessible information or alternative format which may be needed by a person who is blind or has some visual loss. Different font sizes are needed by different people. Note it is the font or word size which needs to be larger and not the paper size.
Learning disability	This term has an existing Data Dictionary definition and is also defined by the Department of Health in Valuing People (2001) . People with learning disabilities have life-long development needs and have difficulty with certain cognitive skills, although this varies greatly among different individuals. Societal barriers continue to hinder the full and effective participation of people with learning disabilities on an equal basis with others.
Lipreading	A way of understanding or supporting understanding of speech by visually interpreting the lip and facial movements of the speaker. Lipreading is used by some people who are d/Deaf or have some hearing loss and by some deafblind people.
Notetaker	In the context of accessible information, a notetaker produces a set of notes for people who are able to read English but need communication support, for example because they are d/Deaf. Manual notetakers take

	handwritten notes and electronic notetakers type a summary of what is being said onto a laptop computer, which can then be read on screen.
Patient Administration System (PAS)	Mainly used in hospital settings, and especially by NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts, Patient Administration Systems are IT systems used to record patients' contact / personal details and manage their interactions with the hospital, for example referrals and appointments.
Read Codes	A coded thesaurus of clinical terms representing the clinical terminology system used in general practice. Read Codes have two versions: version 2 (v2) and version 3 (CTV3 or v3), which are the basic means by which clinicians record patient findings and procedures.
Speech-to-text-reporter (STTR)	A STTR types a verbatim (word for word) account of what is being said and the information appears on screen in real time for users to read. A transcript may be available and typed text can also be presented in alternative formats. This is a type of communication support which may be needed by a person who is d/Deaf and able to read English.
SNOMED CT (Systematised Nomenclature of Medicine Clinical Terms)	Classification of medical terms and phrases, providing codes, terms, synonyms and definitions. SNOMED CT is managed and maintained internationally by the International Health Terminology Standards Development Organisation (IHTSDO) and in the UK by the UK Terminology Centre (UKTC) . SNOMED CT has been adopted as the standard clinical terminology for the NHS in England .
Text Relay	Text Relay enables people with hearing loss or speech impairment to access the telephone network. A relay assistant acts as an intermediary to convert speech to text and vice versa. British Telecom (BT)'s 'Next Generation Text' (NGT) service extends access to the Text Relay service from a wider range of devices including via smartphone, laptop, tablet or computer, as well as through the traditional textphone.
Translator	A person able to translate the written word into a different signed, spoken or written language. For example a sign language translator is able to translate written documents into sign language.