

Letter to the Editor

Improve communication with deaf and hard of hearing clients during Covid-19

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Dear Editor,

COVID-19 is a new pandemic caused by the new coronavirus, SARS CoV, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has advised face masks to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus to others. These safety measures devices protect people but interfere with accessible and effective communication for the deaf and hard of hearing [DHH] [1]. Face masks may change the intelligibility of speech communication in hearing-impaired people because they look for visual cues from the mouth to understand speech [2], but they cannot read people's lips or see the faces of who those talk to them. Therefore, they may be at greater risk of social isolation and loneliness due to difficult communication [1].

Here, there are some practical steps to reduce this new communication barrier:

If clients use a hearing aid, make sure they use it

and it works. People who communicate using sign language may need an interpreter. The clients or their families can advise you on the most appropriate method of communication [3].

Get the patient's attention: you need to get the patient's attention before you can start a conversation. If they do not expect you to talk to them, they may not hear you. To pay attention to them, put your hand on their shoulder or give them a visual signal before you start talking to them.

Use transparent masks: the use of a transparent surgical mask when preparing visible input improves speech perception in noise for listeners with hearing loss [2,4].

Use of technology: use automatic speech-to-text applications such as live transcribe and sound notification, Otter, and other application that turns voice conversations into smart notes, and other applications such as earphone with a microphone can help to communicate with hearing-impaired people [5].

Written communication: you can use pen and paper or marker and table. Simple writing can be useful, you can use a weird keyword on a piece of paper [3].

It is essential that all health professionals have excellent communication skills and deaf awareness, and use the best communication strategies to communicate with clients with hearing loss. This improves their experience during the outbreak of COVID.

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