

Communicating with Hearing Impaired Patients

The Medical Society of Delaware has received multiple questions about providing sign language interpreters for hearing impaired patients. Below are key features of the Americans with Disabilities Act in regards to hearing impaired patients accessing health care:

- Physicians must provide means of effective communication with hearing impaired patients. This may be accomplished with: note taking, written materials, lip reading, telecommunications devices for the deaf, e-mail communication, and qualified interpreters.
- Qualified interpreters may include family members or friends (as long as they are effective, accurate, and impartial – especially in personal or confidential situations) and are acceptable to the patient, personnel from the practice or facility, or interpreters from interpreter services.
- It is the physician's responsibility to determine whether an interpreter or other alternative is required to ensure effective communication with the patient. At routine visits, written communication may ensure effective communication. In other instances, when a conversation is particularly important to the care and services being provided, a qualified interpreter may be the best means to ensure effective communication.
- If an interpreter service is required, the physician or facility is responsible for the cost. These charges cannot be passed along to the patient directly or indirectly.

Resources:

- **For Medicaid Patients** – Unison and Delaware Physicians Care, Inc. (DPCI) both provide interpretation services for their members at no cost to physicians. For more information, call Unison's Special Needs Unit at 877-844-8844 or DPCI's Members Services at 866-543-2167.
- **Telephone Relay Services (provided free of charge)** – These services act as a facilitator for two-way conversations. An operator relays spoken messages in text to the deaf person, and relays the written response back to the listener verbally. Call Deaf Contact at 302-761-9700 or dial 711 for Delaware Relay Service.
- **Interpreter Services (fee charged for services)**
 - Deaf Communication Services, 302-266-6877
 - DEAFinitions & Interpreting, 302-563-7714
 - DEAFinitely Accessible, 302-529-7088

Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Delaware Division of Vocational Rehab, 302-761-8275