

Speaking out to improve communication at health appointments

Alex* lives in Wokingham. She is deaf. Alex handed in a letter to her GP surgery requesting a lipspeaker for all appointments, yet she still had to request one when it came to booking an appointment. She had to explain her requirements all over again.

The receptionist informed Alex that lipspeakers had to be booked ten days in advance, so the appointment was scheduled accordingly. Ten days later Alex arrived at the surgery for her appointment only to find the lipspeaker had not been booked. Alex took the decision to go ahead with the appointment having already waited ten days for it. Alex described the feeling of having to “*brace myself*” To walk into an appointment without communication support.

During the appointment, Alex did not 100% understand what GP had said. Alex pretended to understand and left unclear about what was wrong. Alex felt unable to ask the receptionist what to do as she felt “*there was no point.*”

Healthwatch have investigated how the Accessible Information Standard is being implemented. Services have a duty to ensure your communication needs are met and should ask you:

- *How you want to communicate when seeing a health professional*
- *How you want to make contact with a health service*
- *How you want the health service to give you information*

Your choices should be recorded in your patient record & this should alert staff so they know what your communication needs are.

Healthwatch is working with organisations such as Deaf Positives & SignHealth to ensure that the Standard is enforced. If a deaf person needs an interpreter at their appointments and their health provider will not book one, we will contact & challenge the health provider. We will continue challenging GPs, hospitals, dentists and opticians until deaf people have full access to health services.

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