

Paul

Born profoundly deaf, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Paul has shortness of breath due to lung and heart issues. He is also Type 2 diabetic and takes a range of medications.

Registering with a new GP

He has been a patient at his GP surgery, Rother House, for 2 years, it was very difficult to register, as the staff didn't seem to have any deaf awareness, and tried to communicate by writing on paper which was difficult as he doesn't have a very good understanding of written English. Paul had a support worker who helped him overcome some of the barriers by assisting him to complete forms, which was done online, Paul felt he would not have been able to manage this by himself.

Making a GP appointment

Paul finds it very difficult to make appointments with his doctor. He finds it difficult to communicate with the receptionist. He often visits the surgery to try and see a GP but is told he has to make an appointment and to wait, maybe for over an hour or to come back in a week. They don't understand when he tries to explain that it is an emergency. He finds it very frustrating to not be able to communicate effectively with the staff there and it causes him to feel stressed.

Paul has told the staff at the GP surgery that he doesn't understand written English, but he feels that they don't really understand that BSL has a different grammatical structure to written English. He believes that it is noted on his medical notes that he is Deaf.

For Paul's appointments he has asked for a BSL interpreter to be booked on some occasions he has been told that the interpreter hasn't arrived and that they will book one 'next time'. Paul only finds out when he arrives at the surgery. He used to be able to use text relay, but not anymore. Delays are caused when the surgery say they will contact Paul, or his PA by telephone, about appointments but those calls don't always happen. He feels that nowadays the system is set up for hearing people and that staff not understanding the communications needs of Deaf people creates another barrier to Deaf people accessing health care.

Paul feels that the delays and poor communication have a negative effect on both his physical and mental health.

He prefers that his PA helps with making appointments rather than any family members. They use a Typetalk app so that they can have proof that they have contacted the surgery. Despite having Paul's medical notes and

knowing he is profoundly Deaf; he is always told (via his PA) that he will have a phone appointment first-which is totally unsuitable for him. They have the same conversations repeatedly about needing a face-to-face appointment and that an interpreter needs to be booked, which can be frustrating. These barriers can put Paul off from trying to make GP appointments.

Seeing the doctor

Paul finds it much smoother when he has an appointment where an interpreter is present. The GP realises that the high-level English needs to be translated through the interpreter. He needs to ask questions to check what his medications are for and sometimes does not understand why he has been given some of them. It's difficult for Paul when medical language is used.

If an interpreter does not arrive Paul usually has to postpone his appointment as the communication problems would be too great for the appointment to be useful.

Managing diabetes

Paul felt that he was expected to take responsibility for his diabetes but didn't understand what he was being told. He takes tablets, injections and tests his blood sugar to help manage his condition. Paul hasn't had a diabetes check-up since joining his new surgery two years ago. He has regular eye screening and attends a private podiatry clinic. He felt like he was passed from Stratford to Warwick due to lack of interpreter? Sometimes forgets medication.

Dentists

When Paul visited his dentist with tooth pain, he was told that the practice was not able to make contact with the interpretation service by telephone or email. He waited nervously for over an hour and then went ahead without an interpreter and had a tooth removed, as the dentist patiently tried to explain what was happening. His dentist has phoned him on occasion to explain about appointments, but he is unable to respond by telephone.

Hospitals

Paul's PA will help to translate letters into BSL for him, and they send a copy of the letter to CWBSLI (Coventry and Warwickshire British Sign Language Interpreting) Paul feels more confident that an interpreter will be booked in this situation.

At Warwick Hospital, told them he needs an interpreter. Felt they didn't appreciate his needs. Several days without an interpreter. Didn't understand what was being said to him about his treatment. Feels stressed when waiting alone in the hospital, feels lonely. When interpreter arrived, they had to go

through all his notes and explain what was happening. Felt that poor Wi-Fi at hospital would have stopped him using a video interpretation service. No information when discharged.

Excellent service at Papworth Hospital, Cambridge, interpreters available there every time.

Paul feels services are poorer since the pandemic, and that there are more barriers, especially with not being able to lip read through masks.

Opticians

Wouldn't take down masks, was told he would be emailed but wasn't, PA checked, four appointments all cancelled, 6 months delay to have an appointment with an interpreter. Waited half an hour before being told interpreter hadn't been booked.

Suggestions for improving NHS services.

Healthcare staff should be trained in deaf awareness and what everyday life is like for Deaf people. Booking interpreters when promised is vital. Low level signing skills could prove dangerous if communication is not clear enough.

Paul feels that Deaf people are disadvantaged when it comes to their health care. Deaf people can't hear what is being said and they can't always make themselves understood as they may not have a voice that hearing people can understand. Feels stressed with waiting for translation and jargon is too difficult to follow. BSL is Paul's first language, not English. He feels that his written English is not good enough to be understood.