

# How do you communicate with deaf patients?

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All kinds of people from different backgrounds, races, languages and cultures attend medical practices all around Australia. One demographic group worth considering is the silent minority – the deaf community.

## **Does your practice have deaf people coming to book radiology or radiation therapy appointments?**

An Access Economics 2006 study finds that there are one in six Australians who have some sort of hearing loss. This figure may increase to one in four by 2050 (deafness Forum of Australia, March 2009).

You will probably be wondering why the deaf community refers to itself as the “deaf community” and as “deaf” rather than as hearing-impaired. Deaf people see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority with their own language, which is Australian Sign Language (Auslan). Deaf people have a common link with

each other through shared history of going to school together, and partaking in deaf community events. Deaf people prefer not to use the term “hearing-impaired” as the emphasis of this term is focused on deafness as impairment, when deaf people do not view their deafness as a negative condition.

## **Communication with healthcare practitioners**

How do you as practising health care professionals communicate with your deaf clients? Do they and their deaf clients write notes back and forth or try to get by with lip-reading? It is imperative that one should never assume two things, 1) that all deaf people can lip-read well and 2) that all deaf people can write and understand written English well. This is not true for all deaf people. Try asking another person to mouth “green” and “red” without using their voice and see if you can distinguish between those two words. Most probably you won’t be able to.

### **Can you help Feet First treat and prevent physical disability?**

Feet First Worldwide was founded in 2004 by Steve Mannion, a British orthopaedic surgeon, to treat and prevent physical disability worldwide. In particular Steve and his team are working to help indigenous medical teams to treat club foot in children. So far feet first has projects running in Malawi and Laos, with hopes to expand further to Cambodia, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Do you have any xray equipment (particularly ultrasound equipment) that may be of use to the charity?

If you think you can help, please contact the charity at  
[www.feetfirstworldwide.com](http://www.feetfirstworldwide.com)

100% of donations are used directly for the purpose of the charity and all work is done by volunteers



Lip-reading also involves a lot of guess work, depending on the content being said. As deaf people are visual people and sign language is a visual language, complex written English notes are not always an effective mode of communication.

### Case Study

A client reported to NABS of his experience at a medical imaging appointment. This deaf man did not have an Interpreter at his appointment. This experience turned to be a very uncomfortable experience for the deaf man and the radiographer. The radiographer, probably experiencing stress of a busy working day, first encountered communication difficulties with the deaf man who was lying still on the examination table. Unbeknown to the deaf man, the radiographer was verbally instructing the deaf man to move to a certain position to prepare for the x-ray. The radiographer was talking out of visual range, i.e. standing behind the deaf man who could not see him and therefore had no way of being able to lip read his instructions. When the deaf man did not move according to instructions, the radiographer moved the deaf man to the required position. This was a very humiliating experience for the deaf man as he was an adult and deserved to be treated with dignity.

The use of a professional signing interpreter would have alleviated this problem. The interpreter would stand in the deaf man's visual range and sign out the radiographer's instructions. Then, he would be able to move himself without physical coercion. This deaf client realised after this experience of the need to book a professional sign language interpreter from NABS for his future medical imaging appointments. Also, the radiographer would probably agree that a sign language Interpreter at the next appointment with a deaf client would greatly assist with communication.

### Government recognition of the need for professional sign language interpreting in private medical and healthcare

In the past, painstaking communication was the reality for most deaf people in Australia when they went to see a health care or medical practitioner. The Australian government saw this critical gap that needed to be met. The National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service (NABS) was established to meet this need. NABS provides FREE sign language interpreters for private medical and allied health care services. These interpreters are fully accredited professionals. They act as the cultural and linguistic bridge between the doctor and the client. This results in a smooth flow of communication between parties. With the ease of communication, medical practitioners are able to provide a more accurate diagnosis of their client.

It is important that radiographers and radiation therapists are aware of and are familiar with the free service NABS provides. Even if a patient with cancer requiring multiple appointments, a NABS interpreter can be booked for each appointment, free of charge, for private medical and healthcare.

NABS is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Fuchsia).

NABS interpreters are also available free for appointments for any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders deaf person at any health care service, doctors office and hospitals.

### To book a sign language interpreter

The national call centre is based in Brisbane and provides service all over Australia. Bookings by email, fax, SMS, email or online can be made anytime. Phone bookings are open

8 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday and on Saturdays 8 am to 1 pm, nationally. Our friendly and helpful call centre operators are here to assist you.

tel 1800 24 69 45

fax 1800 24 69 14

SMS 0427 671 261

TTY 1800 24 69 48

email [bookings@nabs.org.au](mailto:bookings@nabs.org.au)

online [www.nabs.org.au](http://www.nabs.org.au)



### ISRRT Celebration of World Radiography Day 2009

World Radiography Day marks the anniversary of the discovery of x-rays in 1895. The purpose of this day is to raise awareness of radiographic imaging and therapy, which play a crucial role in the diagnosis and the treatment of patients and, most importantly, ensuring radiation is kept to the minimum required, hence improving the quality of patient care.

The 8th of November will be celebrated by radiographers worldwide as World Radiography Day to commemorate Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen's discovery. On this day in 1895, Prof Roentgen was working with cathode rays using evacuated glass bulbs. He noted that when a current passed across the bulb, a barium platino-cyanide screen fluoresced and furthermore he noted the effect of the phenomenon on photographic plates. He termed this new discovery "x-rays". He further asserted that, with the use of these x-rays he was able to see through the body. Within three months of Roentgen's discovery, radiographs were generated in major cities.

The International Society of Radiographers and Radiological Technologists (ISRRT) would like to encourage radiographers all over the world to celebrate this great discovery. World Radiography Day is an annual international initiative intended to raise awareness of, and to stimulate an interest in, the profession of radiography. In addition it is aimed at highlighting the importance of radiography and the indispensable function it plays in the health care environment. Participation in this celebration could include exhibitions/open days and presentations on radiography as a career to the public and to potential students and also to other health professionals. The day may be used as an opportunity to sensitize, inform, and educate the public about radiography as well as what radiographers actually do.

The theme adopted by the ISRRT for the 2009 World Radiography Day celebration is: "Radiographers Care About YOUR Protection".

The ISRRT has pledged its support to the 'Image Gently' campaign. The goal of this campaign is 'to change practice by increasing awareness of the opportunities to lower radiation dose in the imaging of children'.

The ISRRT encourages radiographers that while they are enhancing the theme of 'Radiographers care about YOUR protection' that they also incorporate the 'Image Gently' goal in their programs to celebrate 2009 World Radiography day.

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