



Talking with your Doctors

By Eloise Schwarz, RN

No one likes going to the hospital, dentist or the doctors' office, especially if they can't hear very well. All that noise, and everyone talking over them, and then when they call your name at the clinic – you don't hear it. What can you do to make sure that you can get good care and not be singled out as the odd person out? Today is your lucky day. You can learn how to be contacted correctly and taken care of with just the right care because in today's healthcare environment, providers are beginning to understand that YOU come first. Here are some practical steps to take now.

PERSONAL:

Living in Sun City Center (SCC) is a wonderful place to be, especially when you have volunteer emergency personnel who are there when you need them. When you first moved in, they encouraged you to fill out the paperwork that identified your doctors, medications, etc. and put this medicine vial in your refrigerator. Have you looked at it lately? Should it be updated to reflect any changes made recently? Do it now so that if anything happens to you – it will be up to date now and put today's date on it. Good. <https://www.suncitycenter.org/>

We have a group here in SCC that helps with medical IDs but there are other Identifications that are available for you. These are so helpful to have since they are worn to help identify you as a person who may need help in an emergency. I have one that helps in case I have an allergic reaction to something.

<https://www.americanmedical-id.com/> <https://www.stickyj.com/category/medical-alert-bracelets>

DOCTOR/DENTIST OFFICE:

When you check into the office, one of the first things you do is check into the kiosk. After that you should always let the office staff know that you are HARD

OF HEARING / DEAF. This means – you tell them that you cannot hear them unless you have some type of accommodations to help you hear them. Let them think about this since they don't always get this type of request. Then ask them politely to add this to your chart. You are hard of hearing/deaf and that you will tell them how you will be communicating with everyone in the office. Options available include a visual alert, tap on the shoulder when your name is called or show a picture card with you name. Wearing a hearing loss button or pin can also help. When completing your patient questionnaires – write on all of the pages.... **“PATIENT/I can NOT HEAR well and use HEARING DEVICES.”** This way they will note this in your file.

Ask the Surgical physician if their office could switch their surgical masks to the new clear window masks that allow for reading their lips while speaking. They are called: *The Communicator*, Clear Communication Surgical Facemask with Clear Window. They are FDA approved.

ADMISSION OFFICE / Surgery or Procedure:

A few cardinal rules to remember before you have any surgery or undergo any surgical procedure where you need to take out your hearing aids or take off your cochlear implants. These devices are very expensive and are hard to replace. The health care facility must understand that they are liable for the loss of these devices in case they disappear, are lost or are damaged.

You will sign a **consent/agreement form** for the surgery/procedure. Be sure to write these items on this form:

- I have a hearing loss
- I need the following in order to communicate effectively with my treatment team (Explain here) _____
- I have been advised the following will be done with my assistive listening devices while I am incapacitated for safe keeping (Explain here) _____
- I have hearing aid(s) or cochlear implant processor(s) which are costly to replace. The hospital is responsible for any damage, loss, or theft of these devices/equipment. The value of replacement is \$ _____

Get Two (2) copies of the agreement showing your written statements, to increase your chances of being reimbursed in case of damage/loss/theft of your devices.

Show appreciation for the help you have received.

HOSPITAL / SURGERY TIPS:

If and when you are in the hospital, whether for a day or more or for an unexpected stay, here are tips to help you stay safe in the hospital environment. Plan ahead with putting together a *'hospital kit'* just like your Emergency Hurricane Kit. Preparation is always best when you don't need it now but you have it when you need it most. Bring along these items but always...remember to remind everyone about your hearing loss.

- Notepad and working pen so that you use this for good communication
- Extra batteries and equipment to hold you hearing devices when in surgery
- A small flashlight so that you can use it in the dark
- Signs that say you are HARD OF HEARING/DEAF so that you can hang them up around your bed and on the door of your room/table
- Ask staff/Nurses and Medical staff to direct their conversations TO YOU and not to your family/friends – You are the patient and You alone are responsible for answering the questions
- Ask the Hospital if they have a Hospital Patient Rep or Advocate to request specific hearing assistive listening devices you may need - tell them what type of hearing loss you have (mild, moderate, severe, profound)
- Ask for anything written if you don't understand the subject being discussed
- Make sure the medical and surgical staff have copies of your hearing devices *Consent Agreement* and the *Consent for Surgery* so that they know where your instruments will be and how they will communicate with you through the surgery/post-surgery process This is a legal contract between you and the treatment providers
- Be prepared to repeat your education about your hearing loss to everyone that sees you and preps you for surgery including: lab, Xray, pre-op nurses, nursing aids, and especially the anesthesiologist. If possible, see if they can use the new clear window masks that are available on the market.
- Get the business card of the Admitting Rep so that you have their contact information for referencing later on.
- Express your appreciation for the help you receive.

Disappointments / Discriminations

Even with all of your preparations and education put forth for your clinic or hospital stay, there may be some disappointments or even some shortcomings you will encounter. Not everyone understands your hearing loss or will provide the accommodations for you as you requested. Consistent reminders in a positive way is how we present our information so that we receive our care but we can also help our experiences make a difference in these setting for the long term.

We can write a letter with our observations and ask that the hospital improve their protocol for patients with all degrees of hearing loss. A copy of this letter may be sent to the state of Florida's Hospital Association where you reside.

If you are unsure what your rights and responsibilities are as they relate to medical communication access, consult the Department of Justice's ADA Business Brief: Communicating with People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Hospital Settings, available for free download at: <https://www.ada.gov/hospcombr.htm>

For situation of discrimination against patients with hearing loss: Copies of discrimination may be made to the state Division on Civil Rights of your state where you live. Florida: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/general-information/office-civil-rights/>

You can also file an American Disability Act (ADA) complaint with the Dept of Justice here: https://www.ada.gov/filing_complaint.htm

https://www.ada.gov/criminaljustice/cj_complaint.html

Other Resources

There are a number of state Hearing Loss Association of America Chapters that offer Hospital Kits for free or for a nominal cost for S&H if you are interesting in ordering their complete kits.

HLAA America Lane County, Oregon <http://hearinglosslane.org/how-to-make-your-own-hospital-kit/>

HLAA Swedish Signs: <https://www.swedish.org/patient-visitor-info/accessibility/printable-communication-aids>

HLAA Wisconsin: <https://www.hlaawi.org/hospital-kits.html>

Hearing Loss Association of America also provides information on Hearing Assistive Technology (HAT) Section on their website here: <https://www.hearingloss.org/hearing-help/technology/hat/>



Eloise Schwarz, a Retired RN /Certified Case Manager from WI, recently moved to Florida with her husband to retire and live near her daughter and son-in-law. A long- time member of the Hearing Loss Assoc of America, she has been involved at the local and state levels for all those years. As a Hearing Loss Support Specialist, she loves to make things simple to understand, to provide information on how to speak up for oneself, and to assure that the goal to hear well is always on the public’s mind. Eloise can be reached through the Sun City Center Hearing Loss Assoc of America (HLAA) Chapter Website: <https://www.hlaascc.com/>