**Communicating with the Hearing Impaired**

**Facts about Hearing Loss**

Hearing loss is a major public health issue. It is the third most common physical condition after arthritis and heart disease.

* Approximately 48 million people report some degree of hearing loss.
* Four out of five Americans with hearing loss do not wear a hearing aid.
* 18% of adults 45-64 years old have hearing loss.
* At age 65, one out of three people has hearing loss.
* 47% of adults 75 years or older have hearing loss.
* Tinnitus (ringing in the ears) affects 50 million people in the United States.
* 60% of veterans who serve in combat experience noise-induced hearing loss. Hearing loss and tinnitus are the most common service-related disabilities.

**Being Hard of Hearing or Deaf May:**

* Compromise awareness and safety.
* Increase fatigue, tension, irritability, and stress.
* Decrease patient’s ability to process, retain, and act on information.
* Impact other health and safety issues such as falls, cognitive decline, and dementia.
* Contribute to low self-esteem.
* Create or increase a sense of isolation.
* Increase patient’s risk for depression.
* Adversely affect overall quality of life.

**Approach**

Approach your client from the front or the side, so that they can see you and gently touch them on the arm or shoulder, try not to startle them. If they can see you coming from the front or the side, they are more comfortable and at ease. Make sure the light is on your face rather than behind you. Seeing you clearly will help in understanding. If the client wears glasses, make sure they are clean and being worn.

**Background Noise**

Turn the volume on televisions and radios down, close doors to block out noises from hallways and loud speakers. The less background noise the better able the client will be able to understand you. Hearing aids amplify not just your speech volume, but the volume of beeping alarms, ringing telephones, and other people’s conversations. Avoid talking with your client while your back is turned to them or from another room. Always look your client in the face and let them see you, talk clearly and loud enough for them to hear you.

**Hearing Aids**

If a client has hearing aids, keep them clean and within reach of your client. Help them adjust the volume level on the devices. If the volume is up too high the client will be assaulted by loud pitched whistles, causing them discomfort.

**Sign Language**

Sign language, facial expression and lip reading help the client understand. Note pad and pencil or pen is another form of communication that works well with the hearing impaired. Use a black sharpie and make your words and letters clear so that the client can read it. The darker the better.

**Speaking**

When speaking to the client with hearing loss, face them. Maintain eye contact when speaking to your client. Be sure the client can see your mouth clearly. Do not chew gum, bite on a pen, or cover your mouth with your hand. Keep your words short, simple and clear. Do NOT speak to them as if they were children and do not scream at them, look them in the face and talk to them. If the client does not understand what is being said, rephrase rather than repeat the same words or sentences. Do not exaggerate words. This distorts the mouth and can make speechreading difficult. Minimize visual distractions. Look for ways to make communication easier. Hand gestures, lip reading, notes, hearing aids, and pictures are all good communication aides.

**Speak Clearly and Slowly**

Lower your voice from its normal pitch and speak clearly and loudly. Do not scream or yell as that gives the client the wrong impression and causes him/her to think you are angry. Some people can hear things at different pitches. Work with your client to see what technique works for them. Pronounce numbers singly. For instance, 67 can be said as “six seven”. Keep to the conversation at hand. Jumping from one subject to another can get confusing and frustrating for the client.

**Using an Interpreter**

If the client is using an interpreter, speak directly to the client. You are communicating with the client not their interpreter.