

Would you kindly circulate this to all members of the Primary Care Commissioning Committee please.

The Deaf community are still experiencing considerable difficulties in accessing primary healthcare. To recap prior to April 2019 Interpreter provision was covered by the INTRAN agreement with DeafConnexions as the BSL (British Sign Language) Interpreter supplier for over 20 years. DeafConnexions are a not-for-profit specialist Deaf organization. Access was an intrinsic part of that agreement and Deaf patients could contact DeafConnexions via fax, (many Deaf patients still use fax machines) text, Skype or via a face-to-face service at the Deaf Centre. The service worked well and enabled Deaf patients to independently, and confidentially, request a primary health care appointment. They were informed of the name of the interpreter and only local Interpreters were used - BSL has regional variations, so a local interpreter is required.

In April 2019, without any patient consultation, or Equality Impact Assessment, the contract was terminated and awarded to D A Languages, a foreign language agency based in Manchester with extremely limited experience or knowledge of BSL Interpreters. Their access to Interpreters is via the online register the NRCPD, they contact freelance Interpreters for bookings and have sent Interpreters from all over England into Norfolk and Suffolk - so with a lack of regional BSL knowledge and journeys of over 200 miles round trip. DA Languages have failed to source Interpreters on numerous occasions and many appointments have been cancelled, leaving Deaf patients abandoned.

In the contract commencing April 2019, direct access for Deaf patients was not considered at all. So if a Deaf patient needs a healthcare appointment they are in a very difficult position. Surgery staff are not proficient and qualified in BSL, during lockdown surgeries kept their premises locked and relied on an intercom system - obviously totally inaccessible for Deaf patients. All surgeries ceased to use a fax. Many Deaf people do not use the internet at all and their literacy in English which is their second language is very limited.

In effect Deaf Connexions have continued to stand in the gap for over two years and enable Deaf patients to independently request appointments. Opticians and dental practices did not commit to the April 2019 contract and so they have consistently refused to source BSL Interpreters. Specsavers have been a huge problem and still refuse to acknowledge patients' needs.

It is my understanding that rather belatedly opticians and dental surgeries have very recently been included in the Interpreting and translation contract arrangements, we are yet to see whether this information has made any difference to the stance of Specsavers.

Despite this debacle, the D A Languages Contract has been given an extension whilst further information and finally patient engagement takes place.

There is allegedly an Enhanced Deaf Support Service being launched, due week commencing 14 June, providing exactly that patient enablement which DeafConnexions has done so faithfully for so many years. At the time of writing there has been no announcement of the commencement of this service

It is my understanding the CCG has delegated this to the NHSE, which could presumably be withdrawn? The previous INTRAN agreement worked well, and here we are over 2 years further on and Deaf patients' access to primary healthcare is appalling.

I see from various CCG meetings' Minutes, an 'at risk' log is kept and yet there is no mention of all the profoundly Deaf patients who are blocked from making healthcare appointments, have not received their routine check ups such as diabetic reviews, COPD reviews etc during lockdown and are indeed 'at risk'.

I fear the plight of Deaf patients has not been addressed or even acknowledged by the CCG and ask that you consider this with some urgency.

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I am sorry we haven't come back to you regarding this matter. I can confirm your query will be acknowledged at PCCC.

Thank you for raising concerns about access for patients with a sensory impairment.

DA Languages was appointed in 2019 following a tender process to select a supplier from the national Crown Commercial Services Framework which provides services to public sector bodies, including health care services. DA Languages meets the requirements and national standards required by Crown Commercial Services to provide a wide range of language services, including non-spoken languages via face to face interpreting and online virtual services.

If the CCG withdraws from the NHSEI regional contract in selecting a new supplier for non-spoken and spoken languages, under procurement law, we will need to undertake a fully procurement process to select one or more suppliers for these services which may take up to a year to complete; there are no guarantees as to which suppliers would meet the criteria and be selected to provide services. It would be possible in this scenario for local suppliers to bid for services. The CCG however has no current plans to change its commitment to a regional approach led by NHSEI however we will regularly review and monitor the performance of the new contract, investigate any concerns that individuals raise and take remedial action where appropriate.

We are sorry to hear of the concerns raised and we continue to actively encourage individuals to raise their concerns with the CCG so they can be fully investigated and resolved as appropriate. There are limitations to the extent to which third party concerns can be investigated as there is no detailed evidence to follow up and therefore it is not possible to consult with all parties involved, identify where the problem lies and agree how it can be remedied.

We note your concerns that GP Practices are no longer able to use facsimile (fax) machines for either NHS or patient communications; this change was made in a move away from non-secure communications via fax. We recognise however that practices must make reasonable adjustments to ensure all patients can communicate with their staff and access services and whilst all have been reminded of this obligation, we will be taking a more targeted approach in the next few months with all NHS providers across Norfolk and Waveney to review existing pathways and consider how we can better enable any patient with a disability who may be unable to raise concerns about NHS services to do so and ensure they can access services easily.

To clarify one of your points, primary care dental and community dental services have always had access to interpreting services and arrangements have recently been extended to include primary care optometry services. Under the new contracting arrangements coming into place from November 2021, community pharmacists will also have access.

Details of the enhanced support service have recently been published and we hope that this will improve access for individual patients.