

THE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlighting healthcare-related educational topics that matter to you

April 2025



The Patient Education and Empowerment Department creates resources that address a range of topics from medical debt to insurance access and disability benefits. The resources we produce are reflective of real-world experiences that meet the needs of the patients PAF serves.

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Recognizing Deaf History Month: PAF's Partnership with DeafHealth



Patient Advocate Foundation believes everyone should have equitable access to quality healthcare services. In recent years, the need for better healthcare access and advocacy for marginalized communities has become more urgent than ever.

In effort to work towards health equity, PAF often collaborates with organizations and groups that help different communities. One such group facing significant barriers in accessing healthcare information and services is the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

We spoke with Allysa Dittmar, Vice President of DeafHealth to discuss how PAF and DeafHealth began working together, what we have accomplished so far, and what we see for the future of our relationship.

Can you tell us how the partnership between PAF and DeafHealth first began?

A: Our collaboration began in 2023 when we attended NPAF's virtual conference, Policy Consortium (watch here: www.youtube.com/@nationalpatientadvocate). The event provided valuable insights into patient advocacy, and we immediately recognized a shared commitment to improving healthcare access. Seeing the potential for collaboration, we connected with PAF to explore how we could bridge gaps in health literacy and accessibility for our patients.

What brought our organizations together, and how has our partnership evolved?

A: Patient advocacy remains critically underserved in our Deaf communities, where significant barriers to healthcare access persist. Our initial conversations

with PAF focused on how we could work together to bridge these gaps and improve support for Deaf patients. We emphasized the challenges Deaf individuals face in accessing reliable health information, as ASL is a distinct language, and English is not always a first language for many in our community. The lack of ASL-accessible resources leaves many without the critical health information they need. Since then, our partnership has evolved, with a shared commitment to making health education and patient advocacy more accessible, equitable, and linguistically inclusive.

From your perspective, what are the most pressing health-related challenges faced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals today?

A: Recent shifts in healthcare policies, programs, and funding are creating new challenges that could have lasting and

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devastating effects on health, particularly for marginalized communities. There is a severe lack of ASL-accessible content and resources on critical health issues, leaving many Deaf individuals without the ability to make informed healthcare decisions that can have life or death consequences. The healthcare system continues to overlook language access, resulting in miscommunication, delayed diagnoses, and inequitable treatment. As resources become more limited, addressing these gaps is more urgent than ever.

What opportunities do you see for DeafHealth and PAF to further strengthen our partnership in the future?

A: A key opportunity is expanding our efforts to translate PAF's content into ASL, ensuring that crucial health information and resources are available to the Deaf community. We are also working towards collaborating

on new initiatives and ideas, such as insurance enrollment support and bidirectional knowledge transfer and training.

How can organizations like PAF and DeafHealth work together to continue raising awareness about the healthcare needs of the Deaf community?

A: The most effective way to raise awareness is by amplifying the voices of Deaf patients themselves. Organizations like PAF have created opportunities and avenues where patients, including Deaf individuals, are able to share their experiences, advocate for policy changes, and guide the development of more inclusive services in healthcare. This means not just simply translating existing content but also ensuring that Deaf perspectives are actively shaping healthcare solutions.

What advice would you give to other organizations looking to improve their accessibility and engagement with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals?

A: The most impactful step is to hire Deaf and Hard of Hearing experts. Accessibility is not just about compliance—it's about cultural competency and meaningful engagement. Organizations should invest in training, prioritize ASL interpretation and other

accommodations in all services, and involve the Deaf community in decision-making processes from the start.

Check out our collaborative Medicare videos:
vimeo.com/showcase/11352560

Exciting Note: We have more Medicare videos launching this summer, so check back!

Please connect with DeafHealth via their website or social media platforms to learn more about their amazing work:

Website: www.deafhealthaccess.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/deafhealthaccess

Instagram: www.instagram.com/deafhealthaccess/

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/deafhealthaccess/

YouTube: www.youtube.com/@deafhealthaccess

To learn more about Deaf History Month, visit: <https://ideasatdom.wustl.edu/deaf-history-month/>