



NHS Management Executive
St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG
6th February 1998

Dear Colleague

PROVISION OF GUIDE COMMUNICATORS FOR DEAFBLIND PEOPLE ATTENDING HOSPITAL OR GP SURGERIES

Summary

1. Because of their disabilities, deafblind people are at a disadvantage when attending hospital or GP surgeries for treatment. When using health services deafblind people have difficulties with mobility, communication and obtaining information in an understandable form.
2. The Commission of Enquiry into Human Aids to Communication published a Report in 1992 entitled "Communication is Your Responsibility". The Report recommended that:
 - responsibility for providing appropriately qualified Human Aids to Communication (HACs) to users lies primarily with the organisation unable to communicate directly and in consultation with the user;
 - responsibility for setting aside budgets and payment for the provision of appropriately qualified HACs lies primarily with the organisation unable to communicate directly with the user.
3. The Report recognised deafblind people as the most disadvantaged among the user groups covered within its remit.

Action

4. All Health Boards and NHS Trusts should be aware of their responsibilities in this area and have appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that deafblind people are afforded the services of a guide/communicator when they attend hospital or GP surgery.

Addressees

For action:
General Managers,
Health Boards

Chief Executives,
NHS Trusts

For information:
General Manager,
Common Services Agency

General Manager,
State Hospitals Board for Scotland

Executive Director,
SCPMDE

General Manager,
Health Education Board for
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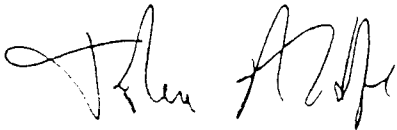
5. Health Boards are requested to circulate this MEL to GPs in their area for information and for action as appropriate.

Other Information

6. A guide/communicator service can be provided by some voluntary organisations. DEAFBLIND UK, 21 Alexandra Avenue, Lenzie G66 5BG (Tel: 0141 777 6111) already provide this service under contract in some areas. Information about existing guide/communicator services in your area can be obtained from Deafblind UK. Information may also be available from the local authority social work department, or from local Societies for the Deaf

7. Data is still being gathered on how many deafblind people there are in Scotland but an incidence of 4:10,000 is thought to be a realistic estimate. DEAFBLIND UK has recently commenced a project funded by the National Lotteries Board to raise awareness of Usher Syndrome (a genetic form of deafblindness) and to identify, inform, advise and support people who have Usher Syndrome. This project is, however, still in its infancy.

Yours sincerely



for KEVIN WOODS
Director of Strategy and Performance Management