

Communication Failure?

Review of the accessibility of health information for blind and partially sighted people in Scotland

Around 170,000 people in Scotland have significant sight loss. Being able to access and understand information on eye healthcare, treatment and other healthcare services, is essential. Almost a decade since the passing of Patient Rights legislation, RNIB Scotland has reviewed blind and partially sighted people's experiences of receiving patient health information in accessible formats such as audio, braille or large-print.

Our report 'Communication Failure? A review of the accessibility of health information for blind and partially sighted people' expresses the need for managing blind and partially sighted people's requests for accessible formats, in a timely and consistent manner. This not only creates clear communication and understanding between the individual and the health service, it can also prevent any unnecessary delays that could lead to a greater risk of sight deterioration for patients.



Case study

"I was sent a letter offering me an initial appointment to discuss cataract removal. The letter gave me seven days to acknowledge and confirm the appointment by phone. If not done so I would be placed at the end of the waiting list effectively adding another four months' delay before being able to see someone at the hospital..."

"I suffer from a chronic pain condition and at the time was unable to use my scanner and assistive technology (screen reader/magnifier software) to read the letter. Eight days later someone visited me and was able to read the letter to me, by which time the period for confirming the appointment had lapsed. When I did call to confirm the appointment, it took some effort to convince the secretarial staff to offer me one and to understand that my not complying with their requirements was not deliberate or my fault. I felt as if I was having to justify my reason for having a disability and that I was not a lazy or irresponsible person."

Key findings include:

- Patient confidentiality is breached due to individuals relying on carers, relatives or friends to read appointment letters on their behalf.
- Individuals are being put at risk of missing treatments, potentially leading to unnecessary sight loss, due to the lack of accessible documents.
- Some individuals were told that they could cope without an accessible format so now feel unable to request their requirements.
- Some people with sight loss did not feel 'worthy enough' to request and/or complain to their health service.

Our full report 'Communication Failure? A review of the accessibility of health information for blind and partially sighted people' is now available to download in Word and PDF at www.rnib.org.uk/scotland.