

WHY SIGN?

'I firmly believe it is not just about common courtesy, but it runs much deeper. Introductions are about making a human connection between one human being who is suffering and vulnerable, and another human being who wishes to help. They begin therapeutic relationships and can instantly build trust in difficult circumstances.' Dr Kate Granger MBE

- ★ Communication is a vital part of our practice, and is the baseline from which all staff-patient interaction flows
- ★ Inability to understand one another can lead to mixed messages and patient care can suffer as a consequence. This is particularly important when it comes to capacity assessments(1)
- ★ Communication barriers have been seen to result in delayed or mis-diagnosis of patients with disabilities presenting to hospital(2)
- ★ Mis-communication and misunderstanding between both parties can lead to distress and upset with resulting challenging behaviours (3)
- ★ Introductions are key for building a good rapport from the outset(4) but if you can't understand the mode of communication used for the introduction, it can be very isolating
- ★ It can also be very frustrating to be misunderstood!-think of a moment where you were struggling to make your thoughts or feelings known
- ★ Overcoming communication barriers often involves some creativity and we do this daily in A&E. For example, using language line, or calling family members or carers for more information. Or using writing to enable to a patient that is hard of hearing to understand.
- ★ Signing is the same and we all use gestures/miming on a daily basis to help explain what we mean

- ★ Many children and adults with learning disabilities and/or communication difficulties use signing to aid their communication(3)(5)(6)
- ★ Various different sign languages, using simplified language, have been developed and the most commonly known are Signalong(5) and Makaton(6)
- ★ Signalong is used most widely in the North West
- ★ Signing is designed to be used alongside speaking and not as a replacement for verbal language. That's why it's important to remember to always speak at the same time as signing(5)(6)
- ★ For more information on signing, it's history and role in health care, please see the below references or speak to the A&E signing team-Mandy (paeds HCA), Beth (doctor), Cally and Yama (play therapists)
- ★ This is a rare opportunity to get stuck in and learn a new skill-it is one of the most rewarding experiences to make a communication break-through with a child and you won't forget the first time a child smiles at you and proudly signs back their name!

1. <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-hub/mental-capacity>
2. Tuffrey-Wijne, I., Goulding, L., Gordon, V. *et al.* The challenges in monitoring and preventing patient safety incidents for people with intellectual disabilities in NHS acute hospitals: evidence from a mixed-methods study. *BMC Health Serv Res* **14**, 432 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-14-432> URL: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/1472-6963-14-432#citeas> accessed on 4/3/2021
3. <https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/learning-disability-assets/004communicationandchallengingbehaviour.pdf>
4. <https://www.hellomynameis.org.uk/>
5. <https://signalong.org.uk/>
6. <https://www.makaton.org/>