



A Personal Reflection

On starting in a Deaf service I felt completely de-skilled, I had to forget all my OT theory, experience and practice for the first 6 months while I learned to communicate and learned about Deaf culture and issues relating to deprivation due to Deafness.

**1:6 people in the UK is either Deaf or Hard of Hearing
87,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language**

Hearing OT working in Hearing Mental Health:

The OT tends to specialise over time in a specific diagnosis or set of diagnoses. They develop a specialist knowledge and skill set in just that diagnosis such as Autism, Psychosis, Brain Injury, Personality Disorder, Dementia, Learning Disability, Attachment Disorder.

Hearing OT working in Deaf Mental Health:

The OT has to, over time, learn and maintain knowledge and skills in **multiple diagnoses** such as Autism, Psychosis, Brain Injury, Personality Disorder, Dementia, Learning Disability, Attachment Disorder.

If you know you're about to meet a Deaf Service User for the first time make sure you book a registered qualified interpreter, allow time for preparing your aims for the session and have a debrief with your interpreter before and after the session. Remember if you are doing an activity using your hands, the person cannot talk at the same time.

You need to look at the person not the interpreter when you are talking to them. You need to make sure the person can see you clearly to watch your lip movements, facial expression and body language as all of this visual information forms the communication.



But OTs Working with Deaf Service Users also have to learn and develop specialist skills specifically related to working with Deaf people.

OTs in Mental Health and Deafness also have to learn to become specialists in all these areas of deprivation too.

**If the art of your OT is therapy through "DOING", the doing uses hands and body.
If the art of your LANGUAGE is through "SIGNING" the signing uses hands and body.
The OT with Deaf Service Users has to work out a solution to this overlap.**

Hearing Service User in a Hearing Service:

Peers & Staff with same language



Deaf Service User in a Deaf Service:

Peers & Staff with same language

Peer groups with similar challenges



Peer group with similar challenges

Deaf Service User in a Hearing Service

Peers & Staff don't understand my language



Hearing OT new in a Deaf Service

I don't understand this language

I have very different problems to peers



I have very different ways of working to this