

# THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



## ***BASEBALL IS BACK!***

After the 2020 season was cancelled due to COVID-19, we are so thrilled and excited to announce that **BASEBALL IS BACK!** The 2021 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Night at the Lincoln Saltdogs game will be

**Tuesday, August 3 at 7:05 pm**

You may purchase tickets, with a portion of the proceeds going to Nebraska Association of the Deaf, at [www.saltdogs.com/NCDHH](http://www.saltdogs.com/NCDHH)



**NEBRASKA FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**Tuesday, August 3rd | 7:05pm**  
**HOUSTON APOLLOS vs. LINCOLN SALTDogs**

**\$11.00/Ticket | Section(s): 104**

A portion of the proceeds will go to the Nebraska Association of the Deaf.

**[saltdogs.com/NCDHH](http://saltdogs.com/NCDHH)**

# We Need You! Advocate!

*John Wyvill, Executive Director*

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It has been famously said: “If not you, Who? If not now? When?” This is very appropriate in our role at the Commission as we continue every single day advocating for communication access. One troubling area of concern is the lack of effective communication access at our airports in Lincoln and Omaha for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Governor Ricketts recently announced the end of the state of emergency in Nebraska for the COVID-19 Pandemic. While this is cause for a great joy and hope for “normalcy,” there is a big ‘but’ here. The joys of normal life, including long-awaited vacations and social gatherings are coming. But first, we must navigate the airports.

There have been countless news stories about travel being back. Long security lines, angry passengers, boarding snafus and airline fees. The airlines and airports have struggled to catch up causing longer customer service wait times, long flight delays and flight cancellations. In some airports they are not equipped to staff concession stands and restaurants, leaving travelers with fewer options for overpriced food and beverages.

In addition, the airports in Lincoln and Omaha do not have up to date communication plans for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Until recently, the Omaha airport referred to deaf and hard of hearing as ‘impaired.’ Other communication access issues at the Omaha airport include:

Declining to install video phones

Lack of effective visual paging at all gates for auditory gate announcements

Declining to provide Deaf and Hard of Hearing cultural awareness training for all employees

The list can likely go on and on for access issues. What can we do about it? You may contact the Mayor of Omaha, Jean Stothert, at [hotline@cityofomaha.org](mailto:hotline@cityofomaha.org). For access issues at the Lincoln airport, you may contact the Mayor of Lincoln, Leirion Gaylor Baird, at [mayor@lincoln.ne.gov](mailto:mayor@lincoln.ne.gov). You may also reach out to the Office of the Civil Rights at the Federal Aviation Administration at:

[https://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/acr/](https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/acr/)

I would strongly encourage you as you travel to share any of your access concerns. If organizations are unaware of an issue, it won’t be fixed. Remember: If not you, Who? If not now, When?

## **NCDHH Full Board Seeking Hard of Hearing Representative**

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The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) is seeking an individual who is hard of hearing to serve on the Full Board. Our legislation requires the commission members shall include three deaf persons; three hard of hearing persons and three persons who have an interest in and knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues. The applicant must be able to express themselves through sign language.

Anyone interested in becoming a Full Commission Board Member may submit an application to the Governor’s Board and Commission Office, attn: Ms. Kathleen Dolezal, PO Box 94848, Lincoln, NE 68509-4848 or you may apply online at: <https://governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req>

## Omaha's Newest Advocacy Specialist

*Jeremy Daffern, Advocacy Specialist - Omaha*

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Hello everyone! My name is Jeremy Daffern, I was born in the Philippines while my dad was in military. My mom discovered that I was deaf when I was 18 months old. Since then, I moved a lot across the United States, until now. The longest state I stayed in was California. After I graduated from Gallaudet University with my dual degrees in International Studies and International Development, I have been to Guatemala and Mexico for my internship and volunteer experience, which I learned a lot about how the deaf communities survive in those countries without services or advocacy from its government.

I learned their sign language and it is intriguing to see how it was much different compared to American Sign Language. From there, I realized my passion is to provide resources and advocacy services to those in need in its rural areas. Many deaf people in rural areas in Guatemala do not have sufficient resources or information they need to have.

Since I completed my internship and volunteer work, I worked for Amazon for less than two years when COVID-19 hit and found this job opportunity with NCDHH, which fits for my passion to work with deaf community. I knew the position would be best for me so I grabbed the opportunity to apply for it. Since I took this job, my biggest passion is to get services that deaf and hard of hearing community needs to survive and enjoy their lives. My goal as an advocacy specialist is to provide the services and resources as I can towards to the deaf and hard of hearing Nebraskans.

I am elated to work along with all of you and meet you all. Do not hesitate and give me a beep anytime. If you have any questions or comments, you can reach me at [Jeremy.Daffern@nebraska.gov](mailto:Jeremy.Daffern@nebraska.gov).

## 2021 Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Omaha Zoo!

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We are excited to announce our upcoming annual event this fall at the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo on Sunday, October 3, 2021! Each year, we partner with multiple community organizations including Nebraska Association of the Deaf, Nebraska Hands & Voices, the Nebraska Regional Programs and more to bring the community together to promote awareness while having a great day at the zoo. Stay tuned for more information we will have coming out on our social media channels.



# Panhandle Happenings

*Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist - Scottsbluff*



This summer the Panhandle will be very busy with hearing loss awareness events. In May we sponsored the showing of the movie “The Silent Natural”. This movie is about a deaf major league baseball player in the 1800’s. The movie was shown with open captions, which was great for those who have hearing loss, but also to educate those who don’t have a hearing loss about the use of captions. We had a great turnout for the movie. The majority of movie-goers were senior citizens which is perfect for reaching our demographic in the panhandle.

The next event was June 18<sup>th</sup>, Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Night at the Ballpark. I worked with the Western Nebraska Pioneers Baseball Club to include fun games and facts related to hearing loss during the game. Ashley Wulf, Lincoln Advocacy Specialist, threw out the first pitch, signed the National Anthem and Take Me Out to the Ballgame.

In-between innings we played “The Whisper Challenge” and “Guess that Sign” games. During the top of the 3<sup>rd</sup> inning we had a “Silent Inning”. At this time there was no announcer speaking and the audience was to put in the ear plugs we handed out when they entered the park. This was to help them experience what it was like to be Deaf or hard of hearing at a baseball game. During the baseball game the announcer gave out facts related to hearing loss which I gave him prior to the game. We had a booth set up as well as ESU 13, Hand & Voices, and Independence Rising. There were over 800 people in attendance. It was a great night of awareness.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> we will be having our annual Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Zoo. This is always a fun event. Many families come out to the Riverside Discovery Center for this day. We offer a scavenger hunt for the kids and have hearing loss facts posted all along the path going into the zoo. There will be other agencies there with informational booths.

The final event is the one I am looking most forward to. We are bringing ASL comedian Keith Wann to the Panhandle!! Keith is a CODA (child of deaf adult) and performs his fantastic comedy routine in American Sign Language. We will have a voice interpreter there for those who do not know sign. This event is open to the whole community whether you have a hearing loss or not. Again, this event will be a great night of awareness about the Deaf culture and community. There will be no charge for this event thanks to our generous sponsors. October 9<sup>th</sup> is the date for a great night of hilarious comedy.

## ***Scenes from the Night at the Ball Park:***



# Support for IEP Meetings

Jessica Larrison, Education Advocate



When we hear Individualized Education Plan (IEP), we often think, “okay what does our child needs to be successful?” Then we get to the IEP table and some parents might freeze up, get upset and shut down, or get angry and lash out. These all depend on the type of personality you have and the relationship you have built with your school. I want to give a few reminders to help you during your IEP meeting.

- 1. Be prepared:** Go into your child’s IEP meeting with your research done, data collected, and explain why you feel this is what your child needs to be successful in accessing their education. Most often, parents know what they want but forget how to fight for it. You need to do your research on why that resource or skill is needed and prove the need to the school. Example: ASR (Automatic Speech Recognition) compared to a CART (Communication Access Real time Translation). Those two services provide the same thing; they both are providing a transcript of what is being said in the classroom. ASR is still relatively new and still makes errors, does not show who is talking, and words that sound familiar might be wrong, as they do not process grammar. CART is a trained individual that can attend in-person or remotely and will include who is talking, the errors are minimal due to their intense training and will ensure the sentence structure makes sense. When you go and talk to a school about why you are choosing one or the other, fight with data and background knowledge and do not forget the laws attached to those, like IDEA, and ensuring there is effective communication happening!
  - 2. Breathe:** We usually are already anxious before these meetings. No one likes to sit in a two+ hour IEP meeting talking about things their child needs in order to gain access to their education. During the IEP the topics include deficits in areas that need to improve and that can take a toll on any parent, especially if you are trying to get services and accommodations for your child and it seems to be ignored. This is when BREATHING steps in and helps you gather yourself to focus.
  - 3. Take a break:** There is nothing wrong with slowing down the meeting and asking for a break to help collect yourself and calm down from emotions.
- There is no time limit on IEPs. Your school can limit it to two hours due to staffing needs but if you don’t finish the IEP it’s not the end of the world and you can ask to reschedule a second meeting as a continuum in order to complete the IEP.

One of the biggest things I have noticed is parents feel pressure to complete and agree with everything during the IEP meeting - that is not the case. You can discuss concerns at the IEP meeting and if you are not happy with the outcome, you do not have to agree to it and can ask for a continuation of the meeting or request a new IEP meeting in order to discuss your concerns. Schools often forget and parents often do not feel like they are an equal team member of the IEP team and that is not how it should be. Both sides bring great insight to the child and we have to stop and think about what the child needs. Again - the / in IEP means it is individualized. We should not be using a cookie cutter approach and one size fits all as this is not the case and each child has their own strengths, needs, and weaknesses that need to be considered when creating and IEP. If you or someone you know needs information or support during their child’s IEP process, please reach out to me at [Jessica.larrison@nebraska.gov](mailto:Jessica.larrison@nebraska.gov).

## It's a Way Cool Job, but...

*Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator*



Hello and Happy Summer!! I hope this finds you well and getting back to some sense of “normalcy” with both life and work.

I want to take this opportunity to remind you of the overarching reason we decided to become professional sign language interpreters. We love Deaf people, American Sign Language and we enjoy being exposed to a wide variety of interesting people and experiences. It's a way cool job and a very fun and rewarding career!

As NCDHH's Interpreter Program Coordinator, I have fielded calls and emails from consumers expressing concerns about Nebraska licensed interpreters' business practices. Here are a sampling of some of the concerns that have been shared with me.

Some interpreters are:

- charging seemingly outrageous fees for their services;
- accepting assignments and not showing up; and
- “double” booking (meaning they charge a “2-hour minimum fee,” but state that they can only work 1 hour because they have another assignment scheduled within that 2-hour time frame).

You might want to consider changing the language you use to represent a “2-hour minimum fee” to avoid consumer misunderstandings and confusion. There are several tenets listed under the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, 6.0 Business Practices that merit revisiting, specifically charging fair and reasonable fees and honoring your professional commitments.

It has become an even more contentious issue during the pandemic with interpreting assignments going virtual. Interpreters have not had to travel for assignments, but still charge a “2-hour minimum fee” and interpreters have not invested in the proper equipment to provide video interpreting services. According to *Deaf Services Unlimited Connection: November 18, 2020*, in order to provide effective interpreting services over video platforms, best practices dictate that you should have:

- A dedicated room free of external distractions,
- A professional backdrop, grey or blue (not black) and contrasting your skin color,
- Appropriate lighting, placed at 45 degrees on each side and possibly using a cool light with a filter to reduce glare and shadows,
- A dedicated external webcam with the auto-focus setting disabled,
- A large monitor or dual monitors (to easily see video participants and any materials needed to interpret effectively), and
- An Ethernet-wired internet (NOT Wi-Fi) with adequate speed to support video interpreting, i.e., download speed
- of at least 15 mbps and upload of at least 5 mbps, the higher the better. It is also best to use a PC and avoid
- the use of iPads or iPhones.

Under the ADA (<https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>) and Nebraska's VRI licensing law, we hold these businesses accountable for the delivery of their services; therefore, interpreters providing services through various video platforms should also be held to these high standards and be accountable for the provision of effective communication. If you would like more information or have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at [Sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov)

## **It's a Way Cool Job, but... *continued*** *Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator*

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The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) states, "Deaf and hard of hearing people deserve to have interpreters who know what they are doing and who do it well. A qualified interpreter is one who can, both receptively and expressively, interpret accurately, effectively, and impartially, using any necessary specialized vocabulary. Interpreters who struggle with their own expressive and receptive sign skills are difficult to understand, and cannot convey their clients' messages accurately. This situation benefits no one. Deaf and hard of hearing people get frustrated, hearing people (businesses, speakers, interviewers, etc.) form an unfavorable impression of the entire experience, and the interpreting profession gets shortchanged."

Please take a moment to reflect on your current business practices and remember:

The driving force behind the CPC is the notion that the interpreter

"WILL DO NO HARM."

## **Learning ASL Young – Incredible Development** *Abby Giambattista, Advocacy Specialist - Lincoln*

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Learning a second language at any age is a wonderful feat. Learning a second language as a child or young adult, encourages the chance of having it become a strong basal feature of the child's development. This being said, all children should be given the opportunity to learn Sign Language.

Learning Sign Language as an infant can increase mental and emotional development at a rapid pace compared to those left with purely verbal communication. Sign encourages gesture recognition, eye contact, and dual-lateral brain function, and more.

A study, done by California School for the Deaf, notes that the average communication progression can include a child being able to mimic facial expressions all the way to having a vocabulary of approximately 10 words by age 1. Now, if you think that is impressive, studies show that by age 3, children are able to put together basic grammatical structures (according to the rules of ASL), determine possessives, create stories, navigate positive/negative answers, etc.. The positive trajectory only continues upwards and onwards. Ultimately, learning ASL at any point in time, but especially while one is young, enhances creativity, communication abilities in both audible and visual languages, brain function, and opens countless doors that might not be there otherwise.

Learning sign really only contains positive effects. Should a d/Deaf individual learn ASL, their world is now accessible through language and communication. Should a hearing person learn sign, their world is now far more expansive than it once was. If something as simple as picking up another language contains the power to better oneself and the world around them, why pass on the opportunity?

More resources to learn ASL are available now than ever before. All the way from baby sign to the more complex, the Deaf community is the top place to pick up ASL; but if that is too intimidating at first, try watching Deaf educators on Youtube or any other internet platform. The Commission also provides myriad resources through our media library! Just give us a call or stop by the Lincoln office.

Learning ASL is an incredible development, but an even more beautiful journey.

# Does COVID-19 Cause Hearing Loss?

*Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist – North Platte*



COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, has been linked to many long-term complications, including heart damage, lung damage and neurological disorders. One emerging area of research is whether [hearing loss](#) can result from a coronavirus infection - either as a symptom or as a complication days or weeks later. We know that many different types of viral and bacterial infections can cause sudden hearing loss. Older coronaviruses that triggered epidemics, such as SARS and MERS, did not appear to cause hearing problems.

Will studies show that SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that triggered the 2020 global pandemic is the same? The pandemic is so recent that there really hasn't been enough research done to study COVID's relation to hearing loss, tinnitus or vertigo. Overall, research shows that these are not common symptoms of COVID-19 infection; nor are they considered common complications as the disease progresses. However, if you are positive for COVID-19 and experience sudden hearing loss, seek prompt medical care to increase your chance of getting your hearing back. Sudden hearing loss is a medical emergency! The faster you get treatment, the more likely you'll get your hearing back.

Based on published case reports, it appears that sudden hearing loss is *rarely* a symptom of coronavirus onset. In a June 2020 report, several Iranian patients reported hearing loss in one ear, as well as vertigo. In another report about sudden sensorineural hearing loss and COVID-19, one Egyptian man with no other coronavirus symptoms developed sudden hearing loss, and then tested positive for coronavirus. But beyond those reports, not much has been published by researchers. Although still rare, developing hearing loss, tinnitus or dizziness later in the infection process does appear to be a little more common. This means these issues are not part of the initial onset of symptoms but develop days to weeks later. A February 2021 systematic review that pooled together data on auditory complications estimated that: 7.6% of people report hearing loss, 14.8% report tinnitus, and 7.2% report vertigo. Researchers emphasize that there is a lack of "high-quality studies" on this topic. A large comprehensive research effort is needed.

Recent research indicates that the coronavirus is linked to tinnitus, for some people. However, we don't know if the virus itself causes tinnitus, or other factors. Ringing in the ears is common, and stress often plays a role. While no large studies exist looking at auditory complications of COVID-19, there are dozens of case studies. In October 2020, the medical journal BMJ Case Reports published a case study of a 45-year-old British man who developed tinnitus and sudden hearing loss in one ear after he became critically ill with COVID-19. Fortunately, his hearing partially recovered after he received steroid treatment for the hearing loss. While it's not possible to prove that COVID-19 directly caused his hearing loss, the study authors explained, it seems very likely this was the case, especially because he didn't receive any drugs that include hearing loss as a side effect (known as ototoxicity). There are reports of autopsy results where COVID virus has been detected in the middle ear bones.

In one case report, a German man experienced acute profound hearing loss after developing COVID-19 pneumonia. Perhaps most enlightening so far are the results of a UK survey, which found that nearly 1 out of 10 coronavirus patients self-reported either hearing loss or tinnitus 8 weeks later. That was surprising, the authors noted, but they also pointed out that the hearing loss and tinnitus could be unrelated or indirectly related (such as a medication side effect). In other words, more research on the long-term auditory consequences of coronavirus is vitally needed. High-quality studies are needed to investigate the acute effects of COVID-19, as well as for understanding long-term risks, on the audio-vestibular system.



## **Does COVID-19 Cause Hearing Loss? *continued***

*Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist – North Platte*

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Some medications used to treat the coronavirus carry a relatively high risk of hearing loss, ringing in the ears or vertigo and dizziness as a side effect. These drugs include quinine, chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine. These antiviral medications have known adverse events, including tinnitus and hearing loss, and the symptoms may be misdiagnosed as being caused by COVID-19.

Some coronavirus patients have reported prolonged illnesses and atypical symptoms, dubbed "COVID long-haulers." In a survey of nearly 650 long-haulers, about one-third experienced earaches and two-thirds had dizziness and vertigo. Only one patient reported hearing loss. There seemed to be "no predictable pattern" as to when or why someone might experience these symptoms. What about hearing loss and vaccines? The CDC's Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System shows no link was found between sudden hearing loss and vaccination, according to researchers from the department of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. The rate of sudden hearing loss appears to actually be lower among vaccinated people, though researchers say cases could be under-reported and that their data is a preliminary analysis.

Bottom line on hearing loss and COVID: More research is needed before we fully understand how the coronavirus affects hearing and balance. We still don't know to what extent the coronavirus causes hearing loss, tinnitus or balance problems. As the pandemic winds down and research shifts to long-term effects, we'll likely begin to learn more. *Information about the coronavirus pandemic is quickly evolving. If you have any concerns about coronavirus and your hearing, seek a healthcare provider's guidance.*

If you would like to discuss my article, anything hearing related or NCDHH's programs and services, please contact me at my North Platte office phone number (308) 535-6600 or you can email me at [kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov](mailto:kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov). I look forward to serving you.

Source:

<https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/53127-Coronavirus-hearing-loss-tinnitus-covid>

***Follow NCDHH on Social Media for Information, Updates,  
Community Events, Advocacy Tips, and More!***



# Behavioral Health Updates on the Website!

*Cody McEvoy, Behavioral Health Coordinator*



We have some exciting news as we are improving our behavioral health tab on the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing website. There is an easier way to find specialized counselors that speak ASL or are familiar with special considerations in working with Deaf and hard of hearing populations. The current format had texts of counselor's name and contact information, along with their counseling credentials.

As Behavioral Health Coordinator, I noticed people had a hard time finding counselors and therapists that would accept their insurance plans, unsure of which counselor to reach out to as they didn't provide any information such as background information other than their name.



So what can we expect from the new update? Well...I'm glad you asked! The new updated will include the counselor and therapist's photo so you can get acquainted with their faces rather than just their names. Along with that, information will include a short biography of their background, insurance plan accepted, and name of their practice including address and contact information. Keep a look out on the website for this development! I hope that it makes finding the right therapist for you much easier! If you have any questions or need assistance in behavioral health resources, please contact me at [cody.mcevoy@nebraska.gov](mailto:cody.mcevoy@nebraska.gov).

# Do You Hear Better at Different Times of Day?

*Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist - Kearney*



It would seem crazy that changing the time of day would change how well you can hear something. Yet, this can happen to many of us, especially those who are hard of hearing.

The act of hearing itself can become very taxing for our brains. The more we have to filter out, dissect, and make sense of, the more our brains are required to work.

This becomes even more evident when we need to hear something while a bunch of noise is going on around us. Although, it isn't our hearing that changes. It is our understanding of what is said. The simple act of filtering out all the distractions puts a massive load on our brains. It reduces our ability to understand what is spoken.

## **Do You Hear Better at Different Times of Day? *continued***

*Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist – Kearney*

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As the day goes on, our brain gets more tired, much like any muscle in our body. The more distractions, noise, or other added sensations, the more worn out the brain can get. All of this leads to a brain that cannot understand what is said later compared to in the morning. The difference between a well-rested brain in the morning vs. a brain that has had to understand all day can be significant.

On another interesting point, some people feel that they hear better during the night. Often during the evening hours, much of our surroundings have become quieter and less busy. Cars on the road are fewer, and big trucks are no longer rolling down the street. Fewer people are out and about. The workday is over. Less noise is traveling the air. There is also science that says sound waves are easier to hear when the temperature is less hot. This is due to sound being a wave and how it interacts with the air molecules as it travels from one place to another. Without getting too into the weeds, the warmer the air, the faster the sound travels. The colder the air, the further the sound travels.

This is why we seem to be able to hear everything on a bitterly cold morning. Sound waves that we wouldn't typically hear can reach us from further away. The snow on the ground can also absorb sound, as well as rain in the air.

Think about what time of the day works best for your hearing. Do you hear better after a long night's sleep? How about during the late evening hours of the day? Do you notice the sound difference between a cold day and a warm day? I hope that this helps you understand some of the ways that outside factors and influences can change our hearing.

## **Multi-tasking: Good Idea or Bad Idea?**

*Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist – Omaha*

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Multi-tasking is a part of daily life. Such as switching back on your phone from texting your friends to social media, or you could be watching television and looking through your phone at same time. You could be multi-tasking so many ways without realizing it. Here is the question: does it affect your brain health or productivity in a positive or negative way?

In an article written by Kendra Cherry, multi-tasking does affect your brain health and productivity in some ways. Some light multi-tasking, such as eating your lunch while scrolling through social media will not affect much on your brain health, but it can easily affect your productivity. However, a heavy kind of multi-tasking can affect your brain health and productivity more than light multi-tasking. When you do heavy multi-tasking you would miss out a lot of information, which could be important.

When multi-tasking, it may cause up to 40% mental block while you are working or going on with your day. With that said, you are encouraged to change your methods while doing tasks. You can focus on doing one task at a time for about 20 minutes before moving on to the next tasks. Keep in mind multi-tasking isn't always bad, it could be good too.

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/multitasking-2795003>

# Troubleshooting Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) Service Issues in Medical Settings

*Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist – Lincoln*



The use of Video Remote Interpreting services has been on the rise. Many deaf individuals who use sign language for communication have expressed frustration with the use of Video Remote Interpreting Services (VRI). This article concentrates on a very high number of issues occurring in hospitals, doctors' offices and emergency room departments. Some of the common complaints expressed:

- *The interpreter in the video screen and I have to sign very slowly to understand what is being asked or said by the doctor and me or nurse. We cannot sign fast because our signs become blurry. We even have to repeat our signed messages.*
- *The interpreter looks so divided and chopped up on the screen. I can't understand what is being said or asked.*
- *The screen kept going black and we lost the interpreter. And we have to call again, and then it happens again.*
- *I have never used this interpreter inside the screen. Why did she get mad at me because she couldn't see my signs?*
- *I was in so much pain and had limited physical movement to be able to face the screen to sign or even see the interpreter sign.*
- *I feel violated when I'm naked for a medical test I had to do. How do I know if the VRI interpreter on the screen is in her room or cubicle space alone?*
- *I don't want to use VRI. I want an interpreter physically in the room. I was told they only use VRI but I could bring my own interpreter and pay myself as long as it is not a family member.*
- *I can't see the interpreter on the video screen clearly due to my poor eye sight.*
- *The VRI didn't work, and the hospital said they can't call an interpreter to come in person because of their hospital rules or policies. So we had to communicate in writing. I have no idea what was causing my pains and what some of the medicines they gave me were or its purpose.*

What Can You Do? If you have experienced problems with obtaining effective communication, you have several options. Ask the nurse or doctor who you can address your concerns or complaints to about the video interpreting service problems in their hospital, doctor's office or emergency department. Most hospitals and their medical centers also have a Patient Advocate office. Express your concerns or complaints with the responsible administrator to make them aware that there are problems that need to be resolved. Ongoing problems that have been addressed and unresolved can also be brought to the attention of the US Department of Justice (under Title II or III of the ADA) and any federal departments that provide federal funds or grants to that particular medical facility (under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act).

File a complaint against the business license of the Video Remote Interpreter (VRI) service provider with the Interpreter Review Board housed under the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Resources are also beneficial when advocating for effective communication. Some good publications to share with your medical facility:

- *"ADA Requirements: Effective Communication,"* publication by the U.S. Department of Justice at <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>.
- *"Minimum Standards for Video Remote Interpreting Services in Medical Settings,"* position statement by the National Association of the Deaf at <https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/minimum-standards-for-video-remote-interpreting-services-in-medical-settings/>.

Contact us at NCDHH for advocacy assistance, guidance or additional resources. We can also assist you with addressing your concerns or complaints and educating the hospitals, doctors' offices and emergency room departments. Feel free to contact me by email at [Kim.Davis@nebraska.gov](mailto:Kim.Davis@nebraska.gov) or by telephone (402) 261-2657.

# NCDHH

Nebraska Commission  
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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