

Facilitating communication at healthcare centers for persons with hearing/speech disabilities

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) require access to health services. But PWDs, especially those who have speech or hearing disability, have difficulty communicating with healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses) and customer-contact personnel at hospitals. Most, if not all, healthcare personnel are unable to use or understand sign language. Due to this communication gap, patients with hearing disabilities have, at times, been given wrong prescriptions. This problem can be addressed by using the services of sign-language interpreters. However, sign-language interpreters are in short supply. ICTs may be used to match the constrained supply with the large demand.

Summary of Recommendations

Immediately: Provide public Wi-Fi at healthcare centers to facilitate short term actions (given below). Create signage at hospitals to inform PWDs about voice transcribing apps (e.g.: Live Transcribe application by Google) which can be used to understand what healthcare service providers (and other officers) are communicating. These apps can be downloaded via public Wi-Fi.



The Live Transcribe app by Google

These apps have their limitations (i.e.: only one-way communication of speech to text, user must be literate, requires a smartphone and data connection/Wi-Fi) and therefore other solutions (given below) must be sought in the longer term.

Short term: List all sign-language interpreters around the country, providing calling information to healthcare centers. Allow PWDs to use public Wi-Fi at healthcare centers to access sign-language assistance via video calls to listed interpreters. Identify PWDs when they access public Wi-Fi at healthcare centers (e.g.,:one-time input at first login) and give priority to their Wi-Fi use.

Long term: Introduce a pre-paid digital identity card for PWDs which can be used by healthcare professionals to identify bearer's needs, giving priority Wi-Fi access and for making payments for services.

The Research

- LIRNEasia conducted a nationally representative survey among 15-65-years-old PWDs in Nepal to understand ICT access and use. Four hundred PWDs from 400 households in 100 wards in all 7 provinces were interviewed between August and October 2018. The questionnaire was designed based on the Washington Group on Disabilities Questions. The results are nationally representative with 95% confidence interval and ± 9.8 margin of error.
- LIRNEasia conducted qualitative research in Provinces No. 1, 2, 3 and 5 in urban and rural locations. The research was designed to understand how ICTs can help ensure independent living for PWDs in Nepal. Grounded theory was applied to identify key themes emerging in interviews of 174 PWDs and nine key informants.

Key Findings

- 1.6% of Nepal population aged 15-65 reported as a PWD, 40.4% of which reported having a hearing or speech disability.
- 54% of PWDs reported having no schooling, and 26% had only primary education. This has a direct relation to the quality of healthcare received as explained by a respondent:

“Since we cannot talk we have to write on paper in order to communicate with others. Since my writing is also poor, if they don’t understand my writing then we have to call language translator in order to translate what I am trying to say.”

-- Hearing disability, Male, Kamalgaupalika

- Communication difficulties have resulted in wrong prescriptions:

“Once I went to the hospital since I had fever. I used sign language to say that I had fever, but the doctor understood that I had a headache, so he gave me medicine for headache. I wish the government kept a sign language translator in hospitals.”

-- Hearing disability, Female, Hetauda

“If we have stomach ache then since the doctors do not understand what we are saying, they give us treatment for other things, and they provide us other medicines.”

-- Hearing disability, Female, Hetauda

- 32% of PWDs own a mobile phone (basic, feature and smartphones).

More Information: <http://bit.ly/NPtech4PWD>

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