

The Deaf Community's Experience with Primary Care Providers

As bionic hearing and cochlear implant technology quickly evolves, medicine has to consistently adapt to the desires of the Deaf community and the persistent audism in our society. Primary Care physicians play an essential part in overviewing an individual's history, promoting preventative care, addressing a broad range of health concerns for patients, and referring their patients to proper medical specialists. As a result, patient trust, empathy, and mutual medical understanding are critical components of accessing primary care. Healthcare and access consistently adapt to each other as marginalized communities advocate for themselves. The Deaf community has had significant strides within the healthcare system, but forms of audism persist within primary care.

My research will elucidate the gaps of knowledge of Deaf people within the primary care system resulting in higher risks of stigmatization, barriers to communication, lack of cultural awareness, and overall resources. With the Deaf communities' personal experiences and primary care physicians' perspectives, the presentation will illuminate Deaf narratives while balancing the technical nature of the medical education system. I will address this primary question: What experiences do Deaf individuals have when engaging with their primary care providers and their staff? Within this research project, I will utilize the lens of Critical Disability Theory as an interdisciplinary lens to recognize the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, such as deafness. By utilizing the Critical Disability Studies theory, I will compare the norms of the social model, which states that disability is underscored by the barriers of society, and the medical model, which emphasizes that disability is a result of physiological factors that must be cured and their interactions to the Deaf community. All of these factors hope to insinuate how we can facilitate Deaf gain within our medical system, an approach that views Deafness as an essential aspect of humanity's diversity.

Disability Studies is an everchanging field with various opinions interacting to form this nuanced model of "disability." The activism of healthcare and Disability Studies grow simultaneously, and it is essential to critically peer into the systems that oppress disabled individuals. This research will acutely assess the medical system, a prime gatekeeper in how disability is addressed, and aspires to call to action tangible actionable items for the field of Disability Studies. These further steps comprise of including Deaf individuals in the surveillance of health research, encouraging ASL among healthcare practitioners, funding for ASL interpreters, and proper education of healthcare providers. Additionally, this research underscores Deaf narratives as the fundamental representation for medical disability justice, which advances the concept of "Deafness" as an advantage within the medical system – ultimately emphasizing the cornerstone concept of Deaf Gain and Disability Studies.