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Title: Wellbeing and the communication of emotions in healthcare of deaf people.

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Abstract

Background

Clinical communication is largely based on the communication and management of emotions between clinicians and patients. When patients are deaf, communication is often mediated by the presence of sign language interpreters or hearing carers, which might impact on the communication of emotions. There is limited research on the experiences of communication of emotions in mental health consultations with deaf patients.

Methods

A programme of qualitative and quantitative research has clarified i. how deaf people with mental health problems feel about their clinical consultations (study 1); ii. the role of communication of emotions in consultations between hearing carers of deaf patients and clinicians (study 2); iii. how emotions are being communicated in consultations with deaf patients in the presence of sign language interpreters and the interpreters' wellbeing (study 3); and iv. how to accurately measure emotional wellbeing in deaf people (study 4).

Findings

These investigations have shown that deaf patients feel ignored, frustrated and envy of mainstream/hearing services; carers feel blamed and undervalued, clinicians feel deskilled and interpreters often experience vicarious trauma; collectively resulting in poorer clinical outcomes for patients. The development of a holistic understanding of the role of emotions requires the in-depth, rigorous and valid investigation of the emotions of all stakeholders involved.

Discussion

Triangulating the results from different studies enables the consideration of emotions of all partners in the care of deaf patients. We propose a series of recommendations that support an open and meaningful communication of emotions in clinical setting with deaf people.