

August 18, 2020

Dear Mr. Skogsbergh and Ms. Golson:

I write this open letter to you from a place of concern and to open up dialogue about the ways Advocate Aurora Health can provide patient-centric experiences for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

As a Deaf father of 4 and a half month old twins, Ryder and Jordan, who were born at Advocate Christ Medical Center and continue to receive follow-up care at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, I am much appreciative of the care provided by your exceptional healthcare providers. Furthermore, the on-site interpretation services provided has made our family's journey much easier, especially during tumultuous and challenging times that persist with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I know of other Deaf individuals who have also frequented your hospitals and clinics in Illinois and Wisconsin after COVID-19 protocols and practices were implemented who do not share the same experiences my family and I have had when it comes to receiving interpreting services. In several situations, these individuals were refused on-site interpreters and were forced to use video remote interpreting services – COVID-19 related policies were cited as the reason why in-person interpreters could not be provided.

The issues do not end there.

While our family's journey with Advocate Health Care is ongoing, it has been generally a positive experience. Our family has faced several challenges and will likely need to continue to find ways to overcome said challenges. These include staff members wearing non-transparent facemasks, not knowing where to direct interpreting requests, and not using emails or communicating through the MyAdvocateAurora portal upon our request.

Furthermore, healthcare-related information has not always been accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing individuals often by way of not captioning digital content. Not surprisingly, this contributes to Deaf and hard of hearing individuals having significantly higher levels of health disparities than their hearing counterparts. Along these lines, I reached out to your team on multiple occasions via social media to address Advocate Aurora Health's lack of captioning digital content – I can't say all-encompassing changes have been made to assuage my concerns because these issues continue to persist.

In the short term, I implore Advocate Aurora Health to make sure all digital content that is shared on the web, social media and other digital platforms is captioned going forward. I also believe it is prudent for Advocate Aurora Health to look into ordering masks with a clear window for your healthcare providers – these will help Deaf and hard of hearing patients, as well as patients of all ages. Everyone benefits from seeing a smile on their healthcare provider's face!

While there is much work to be done to ensure Advocate Aurora Health provides patient-centric experiences to Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, I believe the challenges are not insurmountable. To this end, I would be privileged to engage in further dialogue and identify different opportunities to improve the overarching patient experiences for members of my community.

Sincerely,  
Corey Axelrod