

ACCESSING AUDIOLOGY - TIM

CASE STUDY

Name

Tim

Access needs

Autism

Audiology needs

New referral into
Audiology



Meeting the Accessible Information Standard

All providers of NHS care or other publicly-funded adult social care must meet the Accessible Information Standard (AIS).

Five steps of AIS

- Identify
- Record
- Flag
- Share
- Meet

Tim is sensitive to sensory information; he finds loud sounds, touch, and visual information, such as bright colours and images, overwhelming and distracting. Tim has good language skills, but finds verbal communication and social interaction challenging. He prefers written communication, with bullet points and some verbal support. Tim has found it difficult to hear his favourite songs at his usual volume setting. Tim visits his GP who refers Tim to an audiology department. The referral letter just states that 'Tim has autism'.

LEARNING POINT 1

The GP identified that "Tim has autism" in the referral letter, however autistic people do not consider themselves as a person with a disability, but instead autism is part of their self-actualisation and the preference now recommended by National Autistic Society is the use of "autistic adult" as opposed to adult with autism (<https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/help-and-support/how-to-talk-about-autism> e.g. 'Tim is an autistic adult'). Autism is a spectrum of lifelong developmental conditions, encompassing a range of needs that affect the way people communicate, including sensory needs and executive functioning (such as memory and attention). Autistic people use a range of communication methods, depending on their needs. By not mentioning Tim's specific communication needs, stage 4 of the AIS has not been met.

Tim is sent a standard letter by Audiology. The letter includes several pages of text in small paragraphs, in size 12 Time New Roman font, and with single line spacing between paragraphs. It requests Tim to arrange an appointment over the telephone.

LEARNING POINT 2

Stage 5 of the AIS ('meeting of needs') has not been met. Tim finds closely compacted paragraphs of text overwhelming. To make documents accessible to a greater number of people, including those with autism, the use of 'sans serif' font (such as Arial) preferably in size 14, and double-spacing between paragraphs is recommended (NHS England, 2016a). It is vital to adjust and personalise appointment letters to meet the needs and preferences of autistic individuals. In addition, like many autistic adults, Tim finds verbal telephone calls stressful. Tim prefers written communication. Multiple contact methods should be available for Tim to book his appointment.

Tim arrives at the Audiology department. He is welcomed by Lisa, the audiology clinician. Lisa begins to explain what will happen in the appointment. She notices that Tim is not making eye contact and does not seem engaged. Lisa asks Tim how he prefers to communicate, and she provides examples, such as written text, images, verbally, or a combination. Tim says he prefers text in bullet points without pictures, with some verbal support. Lisa supplies information in this format.

LEARNING POINT 3

Stage 1 ('identification of needs') and stage 5 of the AIS have now been met. Importantly, different people with autism have different sensory and communication needs. Some autistic adults are over-responsive to sensory information – for instance, Tim finds images and colours distracting, but he requires verbal support. Easy read with images would not be appropriate for Tim. Some autistic adults are under-responsive to sensory information. It is vital to ask autistic adults how they prefer to communicate and whether they require images or verbal support. Lisa records Tim's communication needs using an electronic system, to ensure they are highly visible and flagged to staff at future healthcare appointments. By recording Tim's needs using an electronic flagging system, stages 2 and 3 of the AIS have now been met.