



STORIES

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Deaf Nursing Student Uses Social Media To Empower Aspiring Healthcare Professionals



By: Chaunie Brusie



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Nurses can be a lot of things — men, women, transgender, non-binary, mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, you get the picture. But can a nurse be deaf?

The short answer to that is, of course, nurses can be deaf.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing nurses have — and continue — to work in the healthcare field, making a difference caring for and treating patients. Nurses who have hearing challenges may use accommodations at work they are legally entitled to, or they may have varying tools that can assist them to do their jobs, but working as a deaf nurse is very possible. Read on for more information about what it takes to be a deaf nurse, along with resources for deaf and hard-of-hearing nurses.

One deaf nursing student's story

Britny Bensman, 27, from Cleveland, Tennessee is a certified clinical medical assistant working in family medicine who is currently pursuing her LPN. She attends Hondros College of Nursing in Westerville, Ohio, the school's first-ever deaf student, and expects to graduate in early 2020.

Although she was born with full hearing, Bensman explains that her parents first noticed that something “was off” with her hearing around the time she was three years old. It was discovered that she lost her hearing from unknown causes and is now profoundly deaf, with a complete loss of hearing in her right ear. She is able to hear about 85% in her left ear with the assistance of a hearing aid and notes that thanks to her parents starting speech therapy with her as soon as they discovered her condition, she is able to speak well.

Bensman also learned ASL from attending Gallaudet University, a move she says she is “extremely grateful” to have made. After getting her LPN, Bensman plans to get her RN, then her MSN/NP. “I want to become a provider for the Deaf community for them to visit someone they can trust and knowing that I know ASL, there will be no communication barriers,” she explains. “Patient education and preventive care are extremely important to me. Many deaf patients do not get all the resources because of lack of communication, interpreters, and closed captioning.”

Challenges of working as a deaf nurse



Image courtesy of [DeafMed Instagram](#)

Bensman’s challenges began with getting into nursing school. She applied to many different schools before finally gaining acceptance at Hondros, who she says immediately got her the accommodations she needed to succeed, with two interpreters, two captionists, and a borrowed hard-of-hearing stethoscope that she can use through graduation. “Hondros gave me hope,” she says. “Hondros opened my door. Hondros will allow me to be the nurse I am meant to be.”

Over the course of her now five years working as a medical assistant, Bensman has also faced some challenges on the job. From fears that hiring managers would dismiss her application if she revealed she was hard-of-hearing to having trouble relying on her go-to method of lip reading in patients with accents or who had facial hair, the nurse-to-be has had to do a lot of problem-solving over the years.

For instance, when she noticed patients getting frustrated when she couldn’t pronounce medications with the letter “s” in them, she came up with the solution to having the patient read along with her from the computer. “I noticed that it makes the patient feel like they have the attention they needed knowing that I got them involved with patient care,” Bensman comments.

Resources for deaf nurses and hard of hearing nurses



Image courtesy of [DeafMed Instagram](#)

Unfortunately, there was a time, not even in our distant past, when the world of healthcare was not so welcoming to deaf nurses. In 2002, John Hopkins Hospital withdrew a job offer for a nurse named Lauren Searls after they found out she would need ASL interpreters. Fortunately, however, Searls did not accept that her treatment was acceptable and fought back, eventually winning her court case, getting a new job offer at a different hospital, and paving the way for other nurses like her.

Today, there are resources that exist to help nurses who are deaf continue to work in healthcare or pursue employment in the healthcare field. For instance, the [Association of Medical Professionals with Hearing Loss \(AMPHL\)](#) works to advocate for and assist deaf and hard-of-hearing medical professionals with a conference, job opportunities, and mentorship programs.

On the job, Bensman uses tools to help her in her role of caring for patients.

- She has a Video Relay Service called Purple via ASL for her to call out and receive messages to and from providers, pharmacies, patients, or insurance companies.
- To obtain vital signs, she uses an automatic blood pressure machine as well as a special stethoscope made specifically for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Her facility also has an interpreter who comes to staff meetings and some of her coworkers have learned ASL as well, although she notes that they are often too busy for her to be able to call on them.

Using Social Media To Empower Current and Future Deaf Healthcare Professionals

Bensman also started her own social media account, [DeafMed](#), in 2016. Her [Instagram account](#) features stories of other deaf and hard-of-hearing nurses, along with tips, inspiration, and education. The social media trailblazer notes that simply sharing stories from other hard-of-hearing and deaf medical professionals have opened eyes and allowed others to turn negative experiences into positive ones.

“The biggest surprise is how many Deaf and Hard of Hearing there are already in the medical field,” she adds. “It’s like we’ve been hiding in our shells. I feel like DeafMed got us out of our shells...we all immediately became a role model to each other and to others.”

Through her own work in becoming one of the nation’s estimated up to half of a million RN’s with some sort of hearing loss and through her social media advocacy, Bensman hopes to inspire other aspiring deaf nurses to know that they are not alone – and show them that it is possible to enter into the medical field.

“No more barriers,” she states. “My goal is to let them believe in themselves and knowing that they can become whatever they want to become.”

It Takes A Village!

By sharing her story Britny hopes to shine a spotlight on the deaf and hard of hearing community. Don't be afraid to share your story, you never know who it could inspire! But, Britny didn't do all this alone, she had many loved ones who have helped her along the way.

Britny was fortunate to have two mentors, who are deaf nurses, to look up to - Tiffany Hanna and Sarah Heins hold a special place in her heart. She's also like to thank her husband, family, closest friends as well as all her teachers, professors, coaches and mentors who had a big impact on her life.

Last but not least, to DeafMed’s Assistant, Michael Schmitz.

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