

Hospital, U.S. attorney reach settlement over deaf patient's complaint

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New London — Lawrence + Memorial Hospital has settled a complaint filed with the U.S. Attorney's Office for Connecticut on behalf of a deaf patient who alleged the hospital failed to provide her with an American Sign Language interpreter when she arrived for an appointment.

Without a qualified interpreter, the patient, who cannot hear at all, alleged she was unable to effectively communicate with the hospital's staff, including those providing her health care.

Disability Rights Connecticut filed the complaint under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, terms of the settlement agreement require L+M to assess patients and/or companions to determine if auxiliary aids or services are required for effective communication. When necessary, L+M will provide appropriate auxiliary aids and services, including qualified interpreters, free of charge to patients or companions who are deaf or hard of hearing.

L+M also will record the need for auxiliary aids and services for patients or companions in the patient's medical record so that hospital personnel can provide the auxiliary aids and services at the patient's subsequent visits.

The hospital will notify the public regarding its policy on the availability of auxiliary aids and services by posting signs in the hospital, putting notice on its website, and including information in its patient handbook. L+M also will develop and implement a grievance resolution procedure regarding effective communication and provide training regarding the provision of auxiliary aids and services to all L+M personnel who have direct contact with patients or companions.

In addition, L+M will compensate the patient involved in the complaint in the amount of \$8,500, the U.S. Attorney's Office said.

"This matter demonstrates the commitment of this office to ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing individuals are able to effectively communicate with their healthcare providers," John Durham, the U.S. attorney for Connecticut, said in a statement. "From the beginning of this investigation, Lawrence + Memorial has demonstrated a commitment to addressing the Americans with Disabilities Act issues raised in this matter and we are pleased to have reached this comprehensive settlement agreement with the hospital."

L+M, in a statement, said: "Although we believe that in 2016, when this complaint was made, we provided effective communication, we welcomed the collaboration with the Department of Justice to enhance our services. Since the affiliation of Lawrence + Memorial and Yale New Haven Health in 2016, many improvements have been implemented to expand our interpreter services to better deliver clear communication to all patients in their preferred language and mode of communication."

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