Dear

       I need your help. You see, I have a hearing loss and I need your help so we can communicate effectively. You take effortless communication for granted. I have to struggle to understand everything I hear.

       In addition, I am apprehensive in strange places because of my problems hearing. This is especially true in hospitals. I fear being isolated from the rest of the world. I fear not understanding what is going on around me when I can't hear. I may not even be able to communicate with the person in the next bed. I am that cut off.

       I also often face needless anxiety and stress if you get impatient with me or are indifferent to my hearing needs, or if you do not understand how to effectively communicate with me.

       Here are a dozen simple tips for effectively communicating with me.

1.   Use my preferred means of communication. That typically means listening to you with the help of my hearing aids and/or assistive listening devices. I supplement this with speechreading (lipreading) so always face me when you are talking. If all else fails, write to me.

2.   I depend greatly on what I can see. Communication must be visible. If I normally wear glasses, make sure I am wearing them before you begin talking to me.

3.   If you are wearing a mask, remove it so I can see what you are saying. If you don't, I can't speechread you. Be aware that the sounds coming from your mask are distorted—if I even hear anything at all. If it is not possible for you to take your mask off when you speak to me, have another person without a mask stand in my line of sight and relay what you are saying to me. This will work just as well, but will take a little longer.

4.   Since I normally wear hearing aids, make sure I am wearing them before you begin talking. If I am not really "with it," check that my hearing aids are turned on, working and adjusted properly before you begin talking.

5.   Don't begin speaking until I am looking at your face. **Keep eye contact with me at all times** when talking to me. Use facial expressions and gestures to help me understand your message. Do everything necessary to get your message across.

6.   Write down any instructions for medications and other important matters. That way you can be sure I am "hearing" you correctly. Another way is to ask me to repeat back any important information you have told me. Only what I repeat back is what I have understood. If it isn't correct, repeat the process until I get it right, or better yet, write it down for me.

7.   **Gently** touch me on my arm or shoulder to get my attention if I have my back turned to you, or if I am asleep, so you don't startle me. In like vein, don't do anything unexpected behind me. You likely will startle or scare me.

8.   **Never** leave me in the dark. Always leave a night light on so I can see what is going on. Remember, my eyes are my ears, and thus I cannot understand you in the dark.

9.   Find out if I am right or left handed before inserting an IV, then insert it in my **non-dominant** arm—whether or not that one is easiest for you. I need my dominant hand free to put on and adjust my hearing aids, to write notes with and to sign with.

10.   Leave my hearing aids, glasses, notepad and pencil within easy reach of my **dominant** hand. I will likely need these things before I can understand you.

11.   Note on my chart that I am hard of hearing and how I like to communicate. For example: hard of hearing—uses hearing aids and speechreads. I have provided you with some stickers for this purpose.

12.   Do not wait until you have removed my hearing aids and glasses and sedated me before explaining what treatments I will be receiving. I need all my faculties intact just to understand you. Give me a complete explanation before you do these things. After that, I won't understand much—I just want to know that you are still there and that you care about me. A smile and a friendly pat on the arm or squeezing my hand will reassure me when I can no longer hear you.

Thank you for being so caring. I really appreciate your efforts to help me understand you.

Sincerely,