

Good practice guidance for GPs when supporting blind or partially sighted people

This guide has been written by blind and partially sighted people working with Sight Loss Councils.

1. Sight loss can sometimes be hidden –

Not all blind or partially sighted people use a cane or have a Guide Dog. Some may have useful vision which allows them to navigate independently but may require assistance in signing in, completing forms, reading standard print, or finding rooms if it is a large facility.

2. Access Requirements – Access

requirements should be kept on the patient's record so that the patient doesn't have to continually repeat themselves, especially when privacy is an issue. Ideally a patient record "pop up" could be used here.

3. Technology – How accessible is your

website and/or app? Blind and partially sighted people use websites and mobile apps to access an array of information the same as any sighted person. Just making the text larger is not enough - it is important that you consider accessibility features from the outset. Software that provide the facility for screen reading, magnification and colour change are available, i.e. Job Access With Speech (JAWS), ZoomText, Dolphin Supernova, VoiceOver (Apple IOS) and TalkBack (Android) are a few to mention.

The accessibility software for computers and mobile devices are amazing. However, if your website or app is difficult to navigate because it is not providing the voice output required it can be very frustrating.

4. Ensure your premises are accessible to people with sight loss – Signage

to your facility needs to be clear with good colour contrast, it should be at eye level. This must be followed throughout including doctors and nurses rooms, reception and toilets. It is important that there is appropriate lighting in all areas. In the waiting rooms ensure that there is both audio and visual options when announcing appointments.

5. Contacting a patient – It is important

that you are following the NHS Accessible Information Standard. You need to know what format the person needs to access their information. Blind and partially sighted people may prefer to be contacted either in large print, braille, audio or electronically. It may be beneficial to remind patients of appointments via phone or text message. The least accessible formats are standard font posted letters, prescription instructions and leaflets. Many patients will now use digital formats; however, some may still

ask for large print (which you should be able to achieve by changing the font size in word to their preferred size). If you need braille or audio please refer to your local Language Support Unit.

6. Helping your patient – At reception it's important to introduce yourself to the person with sight loss, as they may be unable to use and signing in screen or access services independently. You should offer support with this. You should ask if they need assistance in finding a seat and also if they will need to be shown where their appointment will take place (you may need to guide them to this). When the patient needs to see the doctor, you may need to assist them to the room or the doctor could collect them. It's important at all times to ask what assistance the person needs. Its good practice to ask how they would like to be guided i.e. preferred side, hand on shoulder, hand on elbow or follow.

7. Additional information, posters and leaflets in the surgery – It is important that you inform patients with sight loss about any written information. This includes any additional information the GP or nurse wants to give to the patient, especially in regard to instructions for prescribed medication.

8. Ask for feedback – It is important that patients with sight loss get the opportunity to provide feedback on the services they receive from you. Make sure that you have an accessible way for them to do this e.g. online or over the phone. This will help you to improve by identifying any issues.

9. Onward Referral – In your referral letter please include details of the patients access requirements.



