

Good practice guidance for hospitals 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 or finding rooms if it is a large facility.

2. How accessible is your website? –

Blind and partially sighted people can use websites or mobile apps, it is important that you consider accessibility features with your website and apps. Just making the text larger is not enough – it is important you consider accessibility features from the outset. They may use a screen reader, magnification software or change the colour of the screen. The website should also be simple, clear and easy to navigate. Ensure that contact details are easy to find.

Software that provides the facility for screen reading, magnification and colour change are used by many visually impaired people, 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 is 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.

3. Ensure your premises are accessible to blind and partially sighted people –

Signage to your facility needs to be clear with good colour contrast and should be at eye level. This approach 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 are both audio and visual options for when announcing appointments.

4. 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, prescriptions, 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.

5. Helping your patient – At reception it's important to introduce yourself to the person with a visual impairment, as they may be unable to use the 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 always to ask what assistance the person needs. It's good practice to ask how they would like to be guided i.e. preferred side, hand on shoulder, hand on elbow or follow.

6. 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 doctor or nurse wants to give to the patient, especially about instructions for prescribed medication.

7. Uniform – Staff should be easily identified by their uniform.

8. Getting to and from the hospital – If the hospital has a dedicated taxi company it would be helpful to have taxi drivers trained how to support people with a visual impairment. For example, guiding a patient to the reception, meeting a patient in the waiting room following an appointment to take them to their vehicle etc.

9. On the ward – It is important that you support patients by showing them where anything they may need is located. Menus should be available in large print, braille, or read out loud if necessary. Whenever you are at the patient's bedside ensure they know you are there and always say who you are. This includes everyone who maybe present if a doctor is doing a ward round. If you are putting something down on the patients table or bedside cabinet always tell them. Always fully explain any procedure you are about to carry out on theme.

10. Ask for feedback – It is important that patients with visual impairments 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.



