

A Helpful Staff Guide to Disability and Interacting with People with Disabilities

Recently the Ontario Legislature passed an Act to strengthen the law on creating a barrier-free Ontario for people with disabilities. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, outlines mandatory standards that will improve accessibility in five areas beginning with the Customer Service Standard. All hospitals must comply with the standard by January 1, 2010.

It's important to remember that people with disabilities are individuals who have the same variety of attitudes, interests and personalities as the general population. As with other situations in life, if you don't know what to do, ask! The person who lives with the disability is the best resource for information on how to help.

What Can You Do?



- T** Take the time to ask, "May I assist you?"
- A** Ask – don't assume. Never assist unless asked
- L** Listen attentively, and speak directly to the person with a disability
- K** Know the accommodations and special services available at Mount Sinai

- Offer to assist the individual, but don't insist. Remember that people with disabilities have their own individual needs and demonstrate various levels of independence
- Avoid making assumptions - ask! Communicate in a way that takes into account the individual. Don't be afraid to ask someone to repeat something you didn't understand
- If the individual has a personal assistant, obtain his/her permission before discussing confidential matters in front of the assistant
- Remember to put people first. Say "person with a disability" rather than a "disabled person"
- Provide notice of any disruption in accessing the hospital and its services, including alternatives (i.e. detours) where available. Become familiar with the assistive devices available
- While acknowledging the presence of an interpreter, attendant, or companion remember to address the person with a disability directly. Allow people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animal/support person
- Please note that a person's assistance device (wheelchair, cane, walker) is considered a part of their personal space. Don't touch anything without asking first (service animals, wheelchairs etc)
- Try to convey the message that you are comfortable and confident when assisting. Relax and smile!

Tips for Providing Care

Individuals With Visual Impairment

- Address the person by name, and identify yourself and your role and speak in a normal tone of voice
- Ask if the person would like assistance and ask how you can help. Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly. Don't leave them in the middle of the room
- Orient the person to their surroundings and identify any potential obstacles in the person's travel path
- Let service animals work; don't touch, feed or distract them unless invited to do so, such action may be dangerous to both of them. Don't be offended if the handler declines to talk about the assistance dog
- Inform and reassure the person by describing any procedures. If the person administers his/her own medication, ask them how they'd like you to organize it
- Tell the person when you are giving them documentation across a counter or table
- Inform the person when a food tray is delivered and where it is placed. Use the 'clock method' to describe the location of food on a plate
- Say good-bye before leaving

Individuals Who Are Deaf, Deafened, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind

- Attract the individual's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where the individual can see your face. Keep your face clear of your hands or objects like a mask
- Look at and speak directly to the individual, not their interpreter
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood. If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (pen and paper)
- A deaf-blind person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither
- Never touch a deaf-blind person suddenly, unless it is an emergency. Don't shout or gesture wildly
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- A personal hearing aid or cochlear implant battery should be the last thing removed or turned off before surgery (or other procedure) and the first thing made available in recovery
- When inserting an intravenous line (IV), use the person's non-dominant arm/hand when possible and avoid placing an IV in both hands/arms at the same time
- TTY Bell pay phones are available in the lobby
- Always use professional, qualified sign language interpreters. Do not rely on unqualified, untrained, well-intentioned 'signers' or friends or family to fill the role of a sign language interpreter. People who are deaf have a legal right to have access to a professionally trained language interpreter. Please call Volunteer Services at for more information at ext. 8200
- *Pocket Talkers* are available to amplify conversations for individuals who are hard of hearing. They can be obtained on your unit or through Volunteer Services ext. 8200

Individuals With Speech or Language Impairments

- If a person has difficulty communicating, do not assume they have an intellectual disability
- Speak in your regular pace and tone of voice
- If you don't understand, ask the individual to repeat the information
- Wait for the individual to finish speaking before you reply
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'. Be patient and polite, and give the individual whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across
- Work with the individual to determine the best way to communicate

Eliminating Barriers & Providing Support

Individuals with Physical Disabilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things • Ask before you help • Assistive devices, including wheelchairs, should not be touched without permission. They are considered an extension of the person and personal space • Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to ensure a clear path 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the individual with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.) • Allow extra time for appointments WheelTrans users may be penalized if they are late for scheduled rides; this is a daily stressor for people with disabilities who use these services
Individuals Who Have Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume what a person can or cannot do • Use simple words and short sentences • Speak directly to the person, not their support person • Ensure the person understands what you have said. Ask him/her to review the information with you or demonstrate that he/she understands. If this is not possible, ensure that the support person understands what has been said, if available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written instructions may be useful • Provide one piece of information at a time • If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again • Be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences • Do one thing at a time • Be polite and patient

Talk about disabilities: words make a difference	
Instead of:	Please Use:
<i>Afflicted by or victim/sufferer of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, disability etc.</i>	- person who has arthritis - person who has cerebral palsy - person with a disability - person who has multiple sclerosis
<i>Aged (the), elderly (the)</i>	- seniors or older adults
<i>Autistic</i>	- a person with autism - a person who has autism
<i>Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity</i>	- a person who has a congenital defect - a person who has a disability since birth
<i>Blind (the), visually impaired (the)</i>	- a person with a visual impairment - a person who is blind - a person with vision loss - a person with a vision disability
<i>Brain damaged</i>	- person with a brain or head injury
<i>Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound</i>	- a person who uses a wheelchair
<i>Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic</i>	- a person with a mental health disability - a person with schizophrenia - a person who has depression
<i>Cripple, crippled, lame, Invalid, physically challenged. handicapped (the)</i>	- a person with a disability - a person with a mobility impairment - a person who walks with a crutch - a person who uses a walker - a person who uses a mobility aid - a person with arthritis, etc.

Talk about disabilities: words make a difference cont.	
Instead of:	Please Use:
<i>Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the), deaf, dumb</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person who is deaf (with profound hearing loss who communicates using sign language) - a person who is deafened (deaf later in life) - a person who is hard of hearing (person with hearing loss who communicates primarily by speech) - a person with a hearing loss
<i>Deaf-Blind (the)</i>	- a person who is deaf-blind (person who has any combination of visual and auditory impairments)
<i>Differently abled</i>	- a person with a disability
<i>Disable (the)</i>	- people with disabilities
<i>Epileptic</i>	- person who has epilepsy
<i>Fits, spells, attacks</i>	- seizures
<i>Learning disabled, learning disordered</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person with learning disability - persons with learning disabilities
<i>Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person with an intellectual disability - a person with a developmental disability
<i>Midget, Dwarf</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person of short stature - a person who has a form of dwarfism - a person diagnosed with "chondroplasia, SED, or whatever their specific diagnosis", a form of dwarfism
<i>Mongoloid, Mongolism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person with Down Syndrome - a person with an intellectual or developmental disability
<i>Normal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a person who is not disabled - person who is able bodied - person who is sighted - a hearing person
<i>Spastic</i>	- person who has muscle spasms
<i>Stutterer</i>	- a person with a speech impairment or impediment

For more information, please visit the Mount Sinai Hospital Internet home page and follow links to Accessibility.

Accessibility Hotline: 416-586-4800 ext. 7286 Volunteer Services ext. 8200 Email: Access@mtsinai.on.ca

Ministry of Community & Social Services Website:
<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcsc/English/pillars/acessibilityOntario/>