

ACCESSIBILITY IN YOUR HEALTH CARE PRACTICE

People with disabilities face many barriers to good health. Studies show that individuals with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to report:

- Having poorer overall health.
- Having less access to adequate health care.
- Engaging in risky health behaviors, including smoking and physical inactivity.

People with disabilities often are more susceptible to preventable health problems that decrease their overall health and quality of life. Secondary conditions such as pain, fatigue, obesity, and depression can occur as a result of having a disabling condition.

Health disparities and secondary conditions can be the result of inaccessible health care facilities and equipment, lack of knowledge among health professionals about specific differences among people with disabilities, transportation difficulties, and higher poverty rates among people with disabilities.

Accessibility applies to both communication and physical access. For instance, health professionals need to be aware of how to effectively communicate with patients who have a range of disabilities, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech, vision, or intellectual disability. Providers should ensure that accessible medical equipment is available for people with disabilities (such as scales, examination tables, or chairs). In addition, providers should plan for additional time during examinations, if needed. Some examinations may take longer than others, for all sorts of reasons, in the normal course of a medical practice.

To identify the barriers and improve access, consider asking the question below when scheduling each appointment.

Question to ask ALL patients:

“Do you have any needs that we can assist you with during your visit?”

Examples:

Help with dressing or undressing

Understanding medical information

Positioning during a procedure, such as a mammogram

Help with completing forms

A sign language interpreter

Adjustable medical equipment that goes low enough for someone seated in a wheelchair, etc.

Your patient’s experience will be enhanced by getting this information *before the appointment* so that staff will be prepared to meet each patient’s health needs during their visit.

For more information please contact: Eileen Sparling, University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies, at sparling@udel.edu or 302-831-8802.

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