

Caring for a Clinic Patient with Vision Loss

The following information is being provided to help you create a positive healthcare experience for patients living with vision loss. Implementing the suggested practices will not only save time in your busy schedule, but your patients will also feel more welcome and confident during appointment visits.

Communicating with Ease

Conduct your conversations like you would with any other person. Use a normal volume and tone of voice unless you are asked to speak louder. Go ahead and use words like see or watch. We use these same terms every day!

Greet and introduce yourself. Address the person by name to clearly indicate when you are speaking to them. Direct questions to the patient, not their companion.

Do not speak to, attempt to pet, or feed a dog guide as distractions may result in injury. State statutes in North Dakota guarantee the right of a blind person to be accompanied by a specially trained dog guide in all public accommodations and conveyances.

Offer assistance when it appears to be needed. Verbal clarification may be all that is necessary or perhaps the patient may wish to follow you to a location using a white cane or dog guide.

Providing Sighted Assistance

Have the patient grasp your arm just above the elbow. They will walk a slight step behind as you lead. Relax and walk at a comfortable pace. State if a pathway is obstructed or becomes too narrow to pass. Place your arm behind your back and they will follow the gesture.

When at a scale, have the patient place their hand on the rail or your forearm as it can be used to help obtain balance. The scale's edge can be found using their foot or cane. A patient with low vision may just need a few verbal cues to locate the scale.

Before going through a doorway, state if the door will be to the right or left side and if it will open into the room or out toward the hallway. Keep facing forward as you walk through the opening. The patient may catch the door with their free arm and hold it open until you both have safely gone through the doorway.

Take a few moments to describe the location of the examination table, desk and chairs. Avoid using vague phrases like, "It's over there". It is best to establish a landmark first, then describe the location of other items. For example, "When facing the sink, paper towels will be on the wall in front of you at shoulder height." Describing a bathroom in this manner allows for their privacy and time for you to assist others.

Tell the patient before you leave a room for any reason and when your return is expected.

State when you are about to begin a procedure. Being touched without warning can be startling. Consider explaining steps of an unfamiliar procedure.

Offer to escort the patient from the examination room back to the front desk.

Accessing Print Information

All print material given to patients with vision loss should be made accessible in their preferred format. Accessible formats include large print, electronic text file, audio recording and braille in either electronic file or hard copy. The Braille Access Center at North Dakota Vision Services School for the Blind in Grand Forks can transcribe electronic or print documents into braille for a small fee. You can contact them by phone at 701-795-2700 or visit their website: www.ndvisionservices.com.

Patients will need sighted assistance to complete forms. If documents are made available in advance, a personal confidant may assist in the completion.

Documents that require a signature should be read aloud. A signature guide or the straight edge of a card can be used to show the appropriate placement of a signature. Appointment dates and times may be shared within a telephone message, sent via email or stored by the patient within an electronic device.

In Appreciation

Thank you for treating your patients living with a vision loss with the utmost care and respect during appointment visits. Your efforts to better understand their needs and capabilities along with your actions taken to maintain their independence and dignity are much appreciated.

Provided by:



North Dakota Association of the Blind

For more information: 701-663-8878 or www.ndab.org
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