American Foundation® for the Blind

Expanding possibilities for people with vision loss

Serving the Needs of Individuals with Visual Impairments in Healthcare Settings: Suggestions for Registration Staff

Introduction

- Terms associated with individuals with visual impairments include, but are not limited to: blind, low vision, legally blind, and deafblind.
  - Vision is a continuum from total blindness to those who have significant usable vision.
  - An individual's usable vision can fluctuate throughout the day.
  - Ask the individual how they would like to be identified, for example as blind or visually impaired.

Tools and Challenges

- Tools an individual may use to access print include: braille, a magnifier, a monocular, text to speech software, and screen enlargement software.
- To move through the environment an individual might use a white cane, a guide dog, or a human guide.
- Individuals with visual impairments may have difficulty with navigation. They may not: see signs, see where you are pointing, and/or be able to read a map visually.
- Challenges with accessing information may include: not seeing a name printed on a badge or uniform, completing or accessing paperwork, or hearing information accurately (especially if the individual is deafblind).

Dos and Don'ts That Show Respect

- ***DO NOT*** grab or push the individual.
- ***DO NOT*** talk to others who are with the individual, ***DO*** talk to them directly.
- ***DO*** identify yourself with your name and title, even if you have met before.
- ***DO*** ask if the individual needs assistance, ***DO NOT*** assume.
- ***DO*** use words like "look" and "see."
- ***DO*** ask the individual if they need a human guide. If they say they do, allow them to hold your arm above the elbow. Walk a half step in front of the individual.
- ***DO*** be yourself!

Strategies for Paperwork

- **Provide paperwork ahead of time in an accessible format.** When possible offer to provide paperwork ahead of time in an accessible format. This may mean emailing paperwork to the individual or sending a braille copy to them.
- **Offer alternatives to print forms.** Not everyone will be able to read regular print unassisted. Some individuals may prefer you provide an electronic copy of the materials (e.g., email or text to them). Others may prefer you read to them or provide a braille copy.
- **Offer options for completing paperwork.** Some individuals may wish to complete the paperwork electronically or by having someone write for them.
- **Don't assume the website, portal, or app is accessible.** Many websites, portals, or apps are not accessible to those who are blind and use a screen reader program. Many people with low vision find that websites, portals, and apps are difficult to navigate. When an individual asks you to email, text, or send materials through the US mail, recognize the reason may be lack of access to the electronic version.

Assisting the Individual to Find Their Location and Become Familiar with the Environment

- Ask the individual if they need directions or information about their surroundings.
- When providing directions be specific. For example, "Follow the hallway to your right and the third door on the left is the Billing Office."
- Ask the individual if they would like a printed map if one is available. Once you provide it, ask if they would also like verbal directions.
- Offer to provide an orientation to the area. Point out important items such as chairs or doorways. Be specific, avoiding phrases such as "over there" or relying on visual gestures when giving directions.
- Ask the individual if they would like to walk with you using human guide.
    - Allow the individual to take your arm above the elbow.
    - Walk a half a step in front of the individual so they can feel the movement of your body and anticipate what will occur next.
    - Offer to describe information such as approaching a staircase or a door.