



Effective Communications in Hospitals

Promoting Meaningful Communications in Health Care

SENSITIVITY TO BLINDNESS OR VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (Adapted from a publication of the American Foundation for the Blind)

1. Introduce yourself to persons who are blind or visually-impaired using your name and/or position, especially if you are wearing a name badge containing this information. *Hello M/M _____ my name is _____ from _____. How may I help you?*
2. Speak directly to persons who are blind or visually-impaired using a natural conversational tone and speed. Do not speak loudly and slowly unless the person also has a hearing impairment.
3. Address persons who are totally blind or severely visually-impaired by name when possible. This is especially important in crowded areas where persons cannot distinguish whether you are looking toward them by hearing the direction from which your voice is coming. *M/M _____, come with me. I'll show you where the cafeteria is located.*
4. Speak directly to persons who are blind or visually-impaired, not through a companion, guide or other individual. *M/M _____, I am _____ from the lab. I will be drawing your blood today. Do you have any questions? I will tie a tourniquet around your left arm in order to find a good vein. I will clean the area with alcohol and then you may feel a little discomfort from the stick.*
5. Immediately greet persons who are blind or visually-impaired when they enter a room or a service area. This allows you to let them know you are present and ready to assist. It also eliminates uncomfortable silences. *Good Morning M/M _____, I am _____ from Transportation. I will be taking you to Radiology for an X-ray. I will be transporting you by wheelchair. How can I assist you?*
6. When you greet a visually impaired person whom you have previously met, identify yourself by name. Even though the person remembers you, he/she may not connect your name and voice in the moment. *Good Morning M/M _____, I am _____ from Dietary. I delivered your breakfast try this morning. I will be taking your lunch order now and I will deliver your lunch tray later. Is there anything else I can do for you before I leave?*
7. Indicate the end of a conversation with a person who is totally blind or severely visually impaired to avoid the embarrassment of leaving a person speaking when no one is actually there. *M/M _____ is there anything else I can do for you before I leave? Would you like me to close the door as I leave?*
8. Feel free to use words that refer to vision during the course of conversations with persons who are blind or visually-impaired. Vision-oriented words such as “look”, “see”, and “watching TV” are a part of everyday verbal communication. The words “blind” and “visually impaired” are acceptable in conversation.
9. Be precise and thorough when you describe people, places or things to persons who are totally blind. Don't leave things out or change a

- description because you think it is unimportant or unpleasant. Be careful M/M _____ I just mopped the floor and it may be slippery.
10. Feel free to use visually descriptive language. Making reference to colors, patterns, designs and shapes is perfectly acceptable. M/M _____ you have a dark purple bruise at your IV site, let me see if it is tender to touch.
 11. Speak about a person with a disability by first referring to the person and then the disability. You should, therefore, refer to persons who are blind rather than to blind persons. This is M/M _____, are you here to take him/her to Radiology by wheelchair? M/M _____ may need assistance because he/she is visually impaired.
 12. Offer to guide persons who are blind or visually impaired by asking if they would like assistance. Offer them your arm. It is not always necessary to provide guided assistance; in some instances it can be disorienting and disruptive. Respect the desires of the person you are with. M/M _____ there are a few steps coming up. Would you like assistance?
 13. Guide persons who request assistance by allowing them to take your arm just above the elbow when the arm is bent. Walk ahead of the persons you are guiding. Never grab a person who is blind or visually impaired by the arm and push him/her forward. M/M _____ please take my arm and we will go to admissions.
 14. Dog guides are working mobility tools. Do not pet them, feed them, or distract them while they are working. This is M/M _____ guide dog; please do not distract him while he is working.
 15. Do not leave a person who is blind or visually impaired standing alone in "free space" when you serve as a guide. Mention environmental features such as chairs, walls, or counters and ask the person that you are guiding where he/she would like to wait for you if you have to be separated momentarily. M/M _____, I have to leave you for a few minutes. Would you like to have a seat while you wait?
 16. Be calm and clear about what to do if you see a person who is blind or visually impaired about to encounter a dangerous situation. Distinguish degree of danger clearly in your communications. For example, if a person who is blind is walking toward an open construction site, call out to the person to stop because open construction is ahead. Then approach the person, briefly describe the situation and offer assistance. If a person who is blind is approaching a less dangerous obstacle such as a stanchion in a lobby, call out that there is a pole in front of the person and ask if assistance is wanted.