

## Remember!

### **Waiting is the hardest part of the visit**

- Don't keep people waiting too long.
- Try to perform the procedure/visit immediately without waiting.

### **People may remember every detail of their visit to you!**

- A good experience may result in less anxiety at the next visit.
- A bad experience will make future visits very difficult.

### **Carers and family members can offer vital support**

- Check if the patient is happy for you to discuss their care with family members or staff.
- Always ask what works best and what to avoid.
- Ask about communication, understanding, previous experience abilities and sensitivities (touch, smell, noise, etc).
- Use the caregivers approach to the patient as a guide for interacting and involve them in the appointment where appropriate and with the consent of the patient.
- Carers are not medically trained - be supportive and understanding.

**The TILII Project works to involve men and women with a learning disability in staff training and is funded by Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust.**

### **An accepting attitude is critical**

- Speak directly to the patient. Show them you value and respect them.
- Be prepared to work from the patient's point of view - a flexible and relaxed approach is essential.
- Use plain English.
- Use a gentle tone of voice.
- Allow the patient to touch and hold equipment before it is used.

### **Adjust the physical environment where possible**

- Reduce sensory stimulation and interruption.
- Remove unnecessary clinical equipment if required.

### **Focus on the positive**

- Compliment the patient on cooperative behaviour and give them encouragement.
- Ignore behaviours that might seem odd.

### **For further information or support...**

- Contact the Community Learning Disability Team in your area.

**Acknowledgements to Warrington PCT, Shropshire PCT and Change Picture Bank.**



## What should you do if your next patient has a learning disability?



A guide for health care staff to help them meet the needs of patients with a learning disability



**Association For Real Change  
Providers of change**

## A learning disability is...

"A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social function), which started before adulthood and has a lasting effect on a person's development." (*Equal Lives: Review of Policy and Services for People with a Learning Disability in Northern Ireland, 2005*)

People with a learning disability share a set of core difficulties, although these may be more or less severe depending on the individual. These difficulties include:

- **Comprehension** - understanding what is said or meant
- **Expression** - making themselves understood and expressing needs
- **Attention** - may be limited
- **Perception** - of events, language and the world we live in may differ
- **Short term memory** - may be limited
- **Coping with change** - this is sometimes a challenge

## The health care visit

It is essential that health care staff be creative, and flexible and, where possible, prepare in advance. Here are some steps to follow to make the appointment a success.

**Communication:** Think about the ways to help communication be effective during the visit. How much language does the person understand? Can they consent to treatment?

**Planning:** This needs to be based on the person's needs and sensitivities, eg, a quiet waiting area for someone who is sensitive to noise, or seeing a patient in a different room where there is less equipment.



**Be familiar with communication and behavioural skills** to promote a positive relationship with your patient. Find out who your patients with a learning disability are and start to build relationships with them.

**Don't jump to conclusions!** Investigate all possible causes. Challenging behaviour is not part of learning disability - it may be a person's only way of telling us something is wrong. Examine patients properly and rule out all other causes before assuming psychiatric or psychological causes.

## Our tips for working with people who have a learning disability

"Telling  
it like  
it is!"

- ✓ **Talk to the person using their chosen name**  
Do not just talk to family carers or staff. Involve the patient in their own care and talk to them, even if the carer needs to answer on their behalf.
- ✓ **Have eye contact with the patient**
- ✓ **Choice**  
If possible, offer choices on appointment time, who the patient would prefer to see, where they would prefer to be seen and whether they wish to have a family member or support worker present.
- ✓ **Extra time**  
Plan to spend at least twice as long with people who have a learning disability. This way, you or they will not be rushed and you will have time to have a more effective appointment.
- ✓ **Show what you will do**  
Use objects and equipment to represent the patient and procedure - for example using a pen to symbolise an injection. Also, demonstrate non-invasive techniques on yourself or a carer, like taking a blood pressure measurement.
- ✓ **Pictures**  
For patients who have difficulty with language, procedures can be explained using pictures or photographs showing what will happen and what will be expected of them.
- ✓ **Consent**  
This is a big concern for health professionals. Northern Ireland guidance states that everyone should be deemed capable of giving consent until an assessment proves otherwise. If a patient does not, in your opinion, have capacity to agree to or refuse treatment, you are legally obligated to act in their overall best interest.