

Serving the Needs of Individuals with Visual Impairments in Healthcare Settings

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

- Provide orientation to the physical environment by being specific, not saying unspecific or vision-dependent phrases such as "there" or "like this."
- Allow the individual to take control of the situation by explaining what they need.
- Explain what you are going to do before you do it. For example, let the individual know before you touch them, when you are moving something, or when you leave the room.
- Ask the individual what information is helpful. Some people like to be warned before a needle stick, others prefer distraction.
- Offer alternatives to regular print; not everyone will be able to read regular print unassisted and may need an electronic or braille copy, or someone to read aloud.
- Offer options for completing paperwork that ensure privacy and acknowledge the individual's unique preferences; someone might want an electronic version, while others require a scribe, that is, someone to write for them.