

Remember!

Waiting is the hardest part of the visit

- Minimise waiting times
- Try to perform the procedure/visit immediately without waiting

People may have exceptional long term memories!

- A good experience may result in better cooperation or less anxiety at the next visit
- A negative experience will make future visits very difficult

Caregivers/and family members often know best

- 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
- Caregivers are not medically/clinically trained — be supportive and understanding

An accepting attitude is critical

- Speak directly to the patient. Show you value them
- Be prepared to work from the patient's perspective, or follow a patient around — a flexible and relaxed approach is essential
- Use a gentle tone of voice and minimise words and touch
- Allow the patient to hold and touch 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
- Ignore behaviours that might seem odd (e.g. unusual vocalisations or body gestures)

For further information or support...

Walsall Integrated Learning Disability Team:

North / West — 01902 413006

South / East — 01922 649088

Health Facilitation — 01902 413006

Your next patient has a learning disability...



A practical guide for health care professionals to effectively meet the needs of patients with a learning disability

www.walsalltogether.net

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."

(Valuing People, DoH 2001)

People with learning disabilities share a set of core difficulties. These difficulties include:

- **Comprehension** — understanding what is said or meant
- **Expression** — making themselves understood and expressing needs
- **Attention** — may be limited
- **Short term memory** — often limited
- **Coping with change** — this is often a challenge

The health care appointment / admission:

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

- **Pre-assessment** — a short telephone conversation with a caregiver could make all the difference.
- **Communication** — consult with caregivers for tips that work. They are your greatest allies and they are the best experts on this person. How much language does the person understand? Can they consent to treatment?
- **Planning** — based on the person's needs and sensitivities e.g. 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 compliance. Find out who your learning disabled patients are and start to build relationships with them. This will pay dividends in the future.
- **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.
- **Collaborative working** — with the learning disability team.

Techniques to use with people who have learning disabilities:

Address the person using their chosen name.

Do not just talk to care givers. Engage the patient in their own care and talk to them, even if the carer needs to answer on their behalf.

Choice

If possible, offer choices on appointment time, who the patient would prefer to see and where they would prefer to be seen.

Extra time

Plan to spend at least twice as long with people who have a learning disability. This way, neither you or they will be rushed and you will have time to have a more fulfilling appointment.

Imitation and role modelling

Use objects and equipment to represent the patient and procedure — using a pen to symbolise an injection etc. Also, demonstrate non-invasive techniques on yourself or a carer, like taking blood pressure measurements.

Visuals

For patients who have difficulty with language, procedures can be explained using pictures or photographs showing what will happen and will be expected of them.

Consent

If your work involves treating or caring for people (anything from helping people with dressing to carrying out major surgery) you need to make sure you have their consent to what you propose to do, if they are able to give it. This respect for people's rights to determine what happens to their own bodies is a fundamental part of good practice. It is also a legal requirement — reference guide to consent for examination or treatment (Department of Health):

Seeking Consent: Working with People with Learning Disabilities
(DoH 2001)

If in doubt, seek advice from Walsall Integrated Learning Disability team.