

ACCESSIBILITY: INTERACTING AND PROVIDING SERVICE TO CLIENTS WHO HAVE VISION LOSS

POLICY:

Pembroke Regional Hospital (PRH) is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of all persons with disabilities in accordance with the Integrated Accessibility Standards O.Reg. 191/11 under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005*.

PREAMBLE:

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Not all people with vision loss are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss can restrict the patients/clients' ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. Some of these people may use a guide dog or white cane while others may not. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell if a person has vision loss.

DEFINITIONS:

Assistive Devices:

An assistive device is a tool, technology, or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities such as moving, communicating, or lifting. It helps the person to maintain their independence at home, at work, and in the community. The following assistive devices may be used by persons who have vision loss:

- Braille
- Large print
- Magnification devices: makes print and images larger and easier to read
- White cane: helps people find their way around obstacles
- Guide dog
- Support person such as a sighted guide
- Digital audio player: enables people to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.
- Portable global positioning systems (GPS): helps orient people to get to specific destinations

GUIDELINES:

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Don't touch your client/patient without asking permission.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If he or she accepts, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so (see guidelines below for guiding a person with vision loss).
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your client/patient to the environment around him or her.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- If you need to leave the person, let him or her know you are leaving and will be back.
- Identify yourself when you approach the client/patient and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion.

- There is generally no need to raise your voice (unless you are asked to) because the person does not necessarily have hearing loss. Say your name even if you know the person well as many voices sound similar.

- Be clear and precise when giving directions, e.g. two steps behind you, a metre to your left, etc. Don't use "over there" or point in the direction.
- If you're uncertain about how to provide directions, ask the person how to do so.
- Do not be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" and "look." People with vision loss also use these words.
- When providing printed information, offer to read or summarize it.
- Offer to describe information. For example, verbally review the discharge instructions, or review the consent form with the client/patient.

Guiding a person with vision loss:

- Ask first if the person wishes to be guided. If the answer is yes, offer your arm. Ask which arm is better. Walk at a normal pace. The person will walk about a step behind. Announce handrails, doors (to the right/left, push/pull to open, etc.) and describe the surrounding areas such as what is in the area or the room.
- If you are guiding towards stairs:
 - Let the person know if they have to walk up or down.
 - Approach the stairs head on, not at an angle and come to a full stop in front of the stairs.
 - Lead or guide your client/patient to the rail side to allow them to take hold of it.
 - Let them find the first step and then start to climb or descend the stairs.
 - Try to be one step ahead and announce the last step.
- If you are going through a narrow doorway or a passage, go first, after explaining the circumstances and describing the area.
- Upon entering a room, offer to describe the dimensions and the location of people and furniture.
- If the person wishes to sit, offer to guide him/her and place his/her hand on the back of the chair.
- Keep the person informed when others approach or leave.
- If you must leave the individual alone, do not leave them standing in the middle of the room, with nothing to hold onto. If they are not seated, guide them to a door, wall, or piece of furniture to stand next to. This will help the person to stay spatially oriented.
- Before opening the door for a person with vision loss, ask if they want you to open it. Indicate whether the door opens to the right or left and whether the door will be pushed or pulled. They may be using the door's location as a reference point.

REFERENCES:

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, Ontario Regulation 429/07. Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).