

# Disability Discussion Guide

This guide is designed for leaders to use with their teams at staff meetings or huddles to refresh their understanding and increase awareness of how to accommodate patients and companions with disabilities. Listed below are details on how to use this guide with your team.

- **Instructions:** Read the “Leader says” section aloud, wait for staff to answer, and fill in knowledge gaps with the “Answer” section. If relevant to a scenario, have staff practice using items or model behavior.
- **Time commitment:** Approximately five minutes per scenario. Leaders can discuss a few (or all) scenarios at a staff meeting(s) or huddle(s).
- **Optional materials for discussion:** Sensory accommodation kits items, such as a Pocket Talker; laptop to reference the [Inclusion page](#); and information on where equipment, such as a lift, is stored.

## Scenario 1: Patient who is hard of hearing

**Leader says:** A patient is hard of hearing and uses lip reading to support effective communication. They do not use sign language. What can you do to help promote effective communication with the patient?

**Answer:** Offer accommodations to the patient, such as:

- Pocket Talker (sound amplifier)
- Written communication
- Clear mask (see [tip sheet](#)) for caregiver (and companion if relevant), if masking is required
- TV with closed captioning
- CART (real-time captioning) services (engage Interpreter Services)

We can also make small behavioral changes to promote effective communication:

- Use a normal volume level (do not shout) and a moderate pace, not too fast or too slow.
- Speak clearly, but do not exaggerate words.
- Face the patient with good eye contact and keep hands away from mouth to help ensure mouth visibility.
- If a patient has better hearing in one ear, position yourself closer to that side.
- Reduce background noise by closing a door if in a noisy area or turning off a buzzing fan.
- Ask the patient open-ended questions to confirm understanding. If a patient is having difficulty understanding a certain phrase or word, rephrase instead of repeating.

**Leader says:** Let’s practice the above behavior. Would someone like to volunteer? (Or leader can model.)

## Scenario 2: Patient with cognitive disability that affects speech

**Leader says:** A patient with aphasia has difficulty expressing their questions, concerns or understanding during their visit or admission. How do you respond?

**Answer:** Offer accommodations to the patient, such as a communication board or pen and paper, to facilitate effective communication. Other options may be more appropriate for people with other types of expressive language or cognitive disabilities, depending on the patient’s preference.

**Leader says:** Have you experienced a similar situation to this one? How did you accommodate the patient?

### Scenario 3: Patient who uses a wheelchair

**Leader says:** A medical assistant at a clinic is checking in a patient who uses a wheelchair and needs assistance to get on the exam table. What accommodations can be offered to the patient?

**Answer:** Examples of accommodations include (may vary by location):

- Accessible adjustable-height exam table
- Portable or ceiling lift
- Sliding board
- Wheelchair-accessible scale (whether standalone, integrated in table or accessory on a lift)
- Assistance with self-care, such as dressing

Discuss with the patient what works best for them. Ask the patient what you can do to facilitate, ease and support the transfer. Remember the patient knows their strengths and weaknesses best.

We offer these accommodations to enable comprehensive, high-quality care on an exam table (as opposed to the patient's wheelchair) if exams or treatment are typically performed on an exam table. It is important that we use safe patient-handling techniques to promote patient and employee safety.

**Leader says:** Can anyone share a time when they used this equipment? How did it go? What were the outcomes?

### Scenario 4: Companion who is deaf

**Leader says:** A companion of a patient is deaf. How do you support effective communication with the companion?

**Answer:** Ask the companion how they prefer to communicate, for example, ASL interpreter, on-site or video remote interpreter (VRI), written communication, CART (real-time captioning) or certified deaf interpreter. We provide confidential language services to both patients and companions at no cost.

We can determine a person's communication preferences by writing simple words, speaking clearly and at a moderate pace to help facilitate lip reading, or using a communication board. We can also obtain information from the patient, but it is important to direct your attention/communication to the companion if possible. If the patient has come to NM before, they may also have the companion's interpreter need documented in their chart.

For urgent situations, an ASL interpreter can be accessed using a VRI.

**Leader says:** Who should you contact to obtain an in-person interpreter?

**Answer:** Contact Interpreter Services to request an interpreter. Please refer to local communication policies on [Policy Manager](#) to learn more.

### Scenario 5: Patient who is blind

**Leader says:** A patient who is blind needs to sign the Universal Consent Form. How do you respond?

**Answer:** Ask the patient for their format preference. Examples of accommodations include:

- Read the document aloud in a private area.
- Dial 630.938.6377 to hear a recorded message of the form in English or Spanish.
- Tell the patient a PDF of the consent form is available on nm.org for download, and it should be compatible with screen-reading software.

**Leader says:** What should we do if the patient prefers Braille instead of the above options?

**Answer:** A Braille option is available, but there will be a delay in the delivery (two weeks or longer). In the interim, an alternative should be offered, such as those above. Contact Interpreter Services to request Braille translations.

**Leader says:** Have you experienced a similar situation to this one? How did you accommodate the patient?

### Scenario 6: Patient with a service animal

**Leader says:** A patient arrives with a dog, reporting it is a service animal. If it is **not** obvious, what can staff do to confirm the animal is a service animal?

**Answer:** Staff may ask two permissible questions:

- Is the animal a service animal that is required because of a disability?
- What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

We welcome service animals in most areas that are open to the public, as is consistent with our local service animal policies and mandated by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). A patient does **not** need to provide proof that an animal is a service animal, such as a training certificate or license, or receive advanced approval.

Service animals should be under control at all times and on a leash, harnessed or tethered, unless such devices interfere with the animal's work or the person's disability prevents use of the devices. The patient or a designated adult is responsible for the animal's care.

**Leader says:** What policy should you reference to learn more?

**Answer:** Refer to your local service animal policy for information on permissible and non-permissible areas for service animals. Also, contact Patient Relations if boarding services are needed because a patient is unable to identify an adult visitor who can care for their service animal during an inpatient stay. A [Service Animal Tip Sheet](#) is also available on NMI for quick reference.

### A reminder on documentation

Document the patient's needs in the Disability Accommodation field in Epic, and document the companion's needs as a Special Alert Note Flag on the patient's chart. Please reference [screenshots of the accommodation field](#) for more information.

### Where to find more information

- [Inclusion page on NM Interactive \(NMI\)](#)
- [Disability Accommodation Guide on NMI](#)
- [Disability Rights Page with links to relevant laws and NM policies on NMI](#)
- [Tips for Effective Communication on NMI](#)
- [Terms and Definitions page with tips on language and etiquette on NMI](#)
- [Ordering Information for Kits and Accessible Equipment on NMI](#)
- [Safe Patient Handling page on NMI](#)
- [Healthcare Stories From People With Disabilities on Equipment and Attitudes \(external resource\)](#)
- Learning & Performance on NMI: Search for "disability sensitivity playlist" to find a compilation of resources, and search for "disability videos" to hear directly from patients and employees with disabilities

**We want to hear from you! Please fill out [a survey](#) with any feedback on your experience using this guide.**