



NHSGGC Staff Guidelines

Working with People with a Visual Impairment

November 2022

(Review due November 2025)

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Introduction

By 2031, the amount of people who experience significant sight loss, currently around 188,000 people in Scotland, will potentially double; this is due, in part to an aging population and, in part to the increase in health conditions such as obesity and diabetes which are associated with visual impairment ¹(Boswell & Kail 2016). For any health board, therefore, these projections verify the fundamental need for staff to continue working hard to ensure all patients, including people who are visually impaired, have the best possible experience of accessing relevant support and services.

Legislative Context

The Equality Act 2010² serves to combine and improve upon the measures contained within previous equalities legislation and so covers a range of protected characteristics;

Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Marriage & Civil Partnership; Pregnancy & Maternity; Race; Religion & Belief; Sex; Sexual Orientation.

¹ Boswell K & Kali A (2016) VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN SCOTLAND: A guide for funders NPC/R S MacDonald Charitable trust <https://www.thinknpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Visual-Impairment-in-Scotland-a-guide-for-funders1.pdf>

² Legislation & Policy: The Equality Act 2010 <https://www.nhsggc.scot/your-health/equalities-in-health/meeting-the-requirements-of-equality-legislation/legislation-policy/>

The Act also has a Public Sector Equality Duty which requires public bodies to have;

“Due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities...The broad purpose of the equality duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities.”³

The consideration of equality and good relations in NHSGGC’s daily business is fully explained in its equality scheme document “A Fairer NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde 2020 – 2024”⁴.

The legislation, as outlined above, also makes provision for reasonable adjustments to be made which take account of an individual’s requirements so that they can access any NHSGGC building and/or service in an equitable manner. For example, in relation to visual impairment, NHSGGC must be proactive in providing accessible

³ Equality & Human Rights Commission (2017) Public Sector Equality Duty <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty>

⁴ A Fairer NHSGGC 2020 – 2024 <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/260193/eih-a-fairer-nhs-accessible.pdf>

information⁵ and in ensuring assistance dogs are welcomed into its departments and services where appropriate⁶.

General Information – Visual Impairment

People can be born without vision or with varying degrees of visual impairment for a range of reasons. Whatever those reasons might be, the spectrum of vision goes from people who have full vision (perhaps with the aid of glasses) to people who see nothing. In between those two ends, there are people at various points who may see nothing or have differing levels/types of sight. There are also people who have a visual impairment which changes/increases over time or which may develop at different points in their life.

It should also be noted that due to the spectrum of visual impairment, described, a person may not “present” with expected “cues” to their visual impairment such as dark glasses, a stick or a guide dog.

Eye Conditions

There are more than one hundred recognised eye diseases⁷. Some of the most common of these are;

⁵ Accessible Information Policy (Clear to All)

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/270932/accessible-information-policy-2021-final-1-1.pdf>

Clear To All - <https://www.nhsggc.scot/hospitals-services/services-a-to-z/clear-to-all/#:~:text=Accurate%2C%20effective%20and%20accessible%20information,on%20the%20healthcare%20they%20receive.>

⁶ NHSGGC Assistance Dog Policy -

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/262658/ifassistance-dog-policy-may18.pdf> - **need link to 2022 reviewed version**

⁷ Site Research UK <https://www.sightresearchuk.org/eye-health-conditions/>

- **Age Related Macular Degeneration [AMD]** - AMD is a painless eye condition that leads to a gradual loss of central vision. As the central vision becomes increasingly blurred symptoms include:
 - ✓ difficulty reading printed or written text (because it appears blurry)
 - ✓ colours appear less vibrant
 - ✓ difficulty recognising people's faces

Around 600,000 people in the UK currently have sight loss of this type and approximately 70,000 new cases are diagnosed every year.

- **Diabetic Retinopathy** - Diabetic retinopathy is a common complication of diabetes which can lead to the loss of central vision. It occurs when high blood sugar levels damage the cells at the back of the eye, known as the retina. Left untreated it can lead to blindness. Therefore, it is important for people with diabetes to keep their blood sugar levels under control and to have their eyes examined once a year for signs of damage.
- **Glaucoma - The most common cause of sight loss amongst those of working age**, this is a term that describes a group of eye conditions causing pressure to be raised in the eye (due to blockage of drainage tubes) which then damages the optic nerve and increasingly causes sight loss. It can often affect both eyes, usually in varying degrees; meaning one eye may develop glaucoma quicker than the other.
- **Retinitis Pigmentosa [R.P]** – R.P is the name given to a group of diseases of the retina, collectively called inherited retinal

dystrophies. They all lead to a gradual progressive reduction in vision, with night vision and peripheral vision being the first things that are noticed. Later, reading vision (detailed vision), colour vision, and central ('straight-ahead') vision become affected. These conditions can become apparent at different ages and although the rate of deterioration can vary it is usually very slow with changes occurring over years rather than months. RP affects approximately 1 in 3,000 to 4,000 people.

- **Cataracts** – As these develop (more common as a person gets older), they cause the lens of the eye to become less transparent and therefore, the passage of light through it becomes distorted: resulting in cloudy or misty vision. **Although this is the leading cause of blindness globally it can be easily treated** – The NHS perform around 350,000 cataract operations each year.
- **Vision & the Effects of Stroke** - Up to two thirds of people experience changes in their vision as a result of a stroke⁸.

For information and support in relation to visual impairment of any type or degree please see the list of organisations in appendix 2.

⁸ Stroke Association - Vision problems after stroke <https://www.stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke/physical-effects-stroke/vision-problems-after-stroke>

Sight Problems after a Stroke

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=effects+of+stroke+on+vision&docid=608021765950679307&mid=A19251097A95492AFDF3A19251097A95492AFDF3&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

Tips for Healthcare Professionals

NHSGGC staff require an understanding of the additional support needs that a person with a visual impairment may have. Beyond such understanding, staff also require to develop the skills and knowledge to meet those needs. Such skills and knowledge include⁹;

- An awareness of the potential barriers for a person with visual impairment and how these may be addressed both generally and within the context of your service.¹⁰
- Patience and understanding with which to offer people tailored explanation and reassurance in relation to their care.

General tips

- Introduce yourself - People with sight loss might not recognise a uniform or badge - tell them who you are, what your role is and any procedures you will be undertaking. Also, if another person is present explain why.
- Bear in mind that visual impairment exists at different levels for different people. If you are unsure **how best to help someone** ask them. Remember also that visual impairment **may not always be apparent**.
- If you call patients in from a waiting room to a consultation, please wait for them and ask if they need assistance/guiding.

⁹ RNIB <https://www.rnib.org.uk>

¹⁰ **NHSGGC Mitigation Guide – under development**

- Always ask if someone needs guiding, how they would like to be guided¹¹. While you're walking tell the person where you're going and what to be aware of (for example, when you're going up and down steps).

- If the person wants to sit down:
 - You can put their hand on the back of the chair so that they can feel the back and arms.
 - Some people may prefer to follow their guide's arm with their hand to reach the back of the chair. If unsure ask the person concerned.

- Tell a person with a visual impairment when you are moving away from them or leaving the room.

- Visual displays and touch screen monitors are not accessible to many people with sight loss. Ideally, tactile and/or audio enabled screens and announcements should accompany the displays. If this is not possible someone should be available to offer assistance.

- Make sure any information required is in a format most suitable for the person concerned. If you are not sure what this format is, ask

¹¹ Guiding a Blind or Partially Sighted Person - <https://www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/navigating-sight-loss/guiding-a-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/>

the person concerned and familiarise yourself with the relevant NHSGGC policy and processes¹².

- Give clear verbal instructions and information during examinations or medical tests. Also ensure that the person is aware if someone else is in the room and explain who they are and their purpose for being there.
- If you are dispensing medication, make sure that the person you dispense it to understands what each item is and where to get further accessible information, particularly if there are multiple brands with different packaging available (see Appendix 1).

As an inpatient -

- When patients arrive, tell them about their surroundings so that they know where they are in a room and who is around them. Make sure all furniture around their bed and their possessions are kept in the same place so that they know where to find them. Help them use the entertainment system - which is often inaccessible to people with sight loss.
- Make sure that a person with visual impairment is aware when food or drink (and what it is) has been placed in front of them and ask them if they need help. - For some people the clock method

¹²Clear to All - [https://www.nhsggc.scot/hospitals-services/services-a-to-z/clear-to-all/Accessible-Information-Policy-\(Clear-to-All\)-https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/270932/accessible-information-policy-2021-final-1-1.pdf](https://www.nhsggc.scot/hospitals-services/services-a-to-z/clear-to-all/Accessible-Information-Policy-(Clear-to-All)-https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/270932/accessible-information-policy-2021-final-1-1.pdf)

maybe of use (e.g. fish at 6 o'clock, potatoes/ rice at 12 o'clock and vegetables at 3 and 9 o'clock) provided they are familiar with it (check with the person). It can also help for some people to have the use of plates, cutlery and trays etc. in highly contrasting colours. Check with the individual if either of these methods or something else would assist them in eating their food.

- Many people are happy to have an identifying symbol on their bed or on their notes so that staff are aware they have sight loss. Ask the person concerned what they would prefer.

Summary of Guidelines for Practice

All members of NHSGGC staff should;

- Treat visually impaired people with dignity and respect
- Always ask for clarity about an individual's needs – do not assume.
- Actively inform patients of their entitlement and availability to communication support and information in different formats – use the relevant formats e.g. when organising appointments¹³
- Check that patients have understood the information given to them
- Record patients' sensory impairment so that it is clearly visible in the case notes – both electronic and paper where both exist.

¹³ Clear to All - <https://www.nhsggc.scot/hospitals-services/services-a-to-z/clear-to-all/>
Accessible Information Policy (Clear to All) -
<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/270932/accessible-information-policy-2021-final-1-1.pdf>

- Be able to signpost patients to specialist organisations who can offer additional support, for example, Visibility, RNIB and Deafblind Scotland (see Appendix 2).

Visibility Patient Support Service

Within NHSGGC, Visibility Scotland offer a Patient Support Service¹⁴ to people with a visual impairment and also to those who may be providing them with support. The provision of information can also include advice for NHSGGC staff. Although the service works in several hospitals, it is not full time on each site and is best contacted via Visibility Scotland's main telephone number (0141 332 4632) so that enquiries can be properly directed.

¹⁴ Patient Support Service in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde-
<https://visibilityscotland.org.uk/services/patient-support-services-glasgow/>

Appendix 1 – Useful Tips for Medication Management

The best way for health care staff to assist patients in getting the most from their medicines is to talk directly with the person to find a solution to any difficulties they may have and to ensure they understand how to use the medications prescribed in the way they are intended to be taken.

Staff should:

- i. Ensure the patient understands how to take their medicines. Is emc/X-Pil needed? (<https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/xpil>);

X-PIL is a collaboration between Datapharm and the Pharmaceutical industry. This website and emc accessibility are managed and published by Datapharm, the Patient Information Leaflets (PILs) are supplied and updated regularly by UK pharmaceutical companies and RNIB deliver Braille, large print and an audio version of the information on behalf of Datapharm.

The number for emc accessibility is free to use 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: **0800 198 5000**

By calling this number you can listen to and/or request patient information leaflets (PILs):

- In large/clear print
- In Braille
- On audio CD

When you call they will need to find the correct PIL and will ask for:

- The name of the medicine
- The medicine's product code number (on packaging or information leaflet). Usually an eight or nine digit number which might have PL or EU in front of it

- ii. Ensure the patient knows how to use inhalers / eye drops etc.
- iii. Ensure the patient is aware of the useful tips such as;
- iv. Use tactile markers such as bumpons (raised coloured dots)
- v. Talking Labels: provide audible guidance on identifying and taking medications. The label attaches to a standard medication pack. A message can be recorded and stored and can be played back at any time by pressing the buttons
- vi. Use a suitable magnifying glass or magnifying glasses (advice available from Optometrists or the Low Vision Aid service)
- vii. Use reminder functions on mobile phones/talking clock/watch etc. to prompt when to take medicines
- viii. Take medicines at the same time every day

Further information can be found at;

NHSGGC Managing Medicines: A Visual Impairment Resource

<http://www.wdhscp.org.uk/media/1021/visual-impairment-resource-pack-managing-medicines-apr-2011.pdf>)

Appendix 2 – Useful Contacts

- East Dunbartonshire Sensory Impairment Team Social Work Department, Kirkintilloch Health and Care Centre, 10 Saramago Street, Kirkintilloch, Lanarkshire, G66 3BF 0300 123 4510
Email: socialwork@eastdunbarton.gov.uk
Web: www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-and-social-care-services/disability-services/
- East Renfrewshire's service aims to provide information, advice and practical support to adults and children who are experiencing a sight loss.

Drumby Crescent, Clarkston, G76 7HN
Web: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0141 451 0866
- Deafblind Scotland 1 Neasham Drive, Lenzie, Kirkintilloch, Glasgow G66 3FA (Office hours - Monday – Thursday 9am-5pm, Friday 9am-4pm)
Telephone 0141 777 6111
Mini com 0141 777 5822
Text 07715421377
Email us at info@dbscotland.org.uk
- Guide Dog Scotland - Glasgow Mobility Team
Axis House, 12 Auchingramont Road, Hamilton, Lanarkshire, ML3 6JT
Glasgow@guidedogs.org.uk
0345 1430206

- Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership, Centre for Sensory Impaired People 17 Gullane Street, Partick, Glasgow G11 6AH - 0141 276 5252
- Inverclyde Centre for Independent Living 10-16 Gibshill Road Greenock PA15 2UP Tel - 01475 714 350
- Renfrewshire Council offers a range of services to residents with a significant sensory impairment - Adult Services Referral Team (ASeRT) Single Point of Access (SPOA) 0300 300 1380 adultservicesreferral.sw@renfrewshire.gov.uk
- RNIB (head office) 12-14 Hillside Crescent, Edinburgh EH7 5EA Telephone: 0131 652 3140 General inquiries contact rnibscotland@rnib.org.uk
- Sight Scotland Veterans 0800 035 6409 Website contact form also available - <https://sightscotland.org.uk/veterans>
- Visibility Scotland 2 Queens Crescent, Glasgow G4 9BW 0141 332 4632 <https://visibilityscotland.org.uk/>
<https://visibilityscotland.org.uk/contact-us/>
- West Dunbartonshire Sensory Impairment Team
 - 16 Church Street Dumbarton G82 1QL 01389 776499
 - Clydebank Health Centre Queens Quay Main Avenue Clydebank G81 1BS 01389 811760