## Communicating with Patients with Disabilities in the COVID19 Response:
### Need-to-Know for the Clinician and Bedside Providers

### Deaf/Late-Deafened/Hard of Hearing
- **Deaf Patients** (unable to hear since birth/early childhood) prefer American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. ASL interpreters are available for video interpretation. [Click here](#) for how to arrange.
- **Late-Deafened Patients** (at one time could hear and lost that ability) do not use ASL and prefer to use remote real-time transcription service called CART. [Click here](#) for how to arrange.
- **Clear Window Surgical Masks** are available to facilitate lip reading. [Click here](#) to arrange. We recommend these masks to be used for hearing impaired and pediatric patients. They may also be used on a COVID floor if a hearing impaired patient who lip-reads is able to use the video communication platform, for staff outside the room.
- **Hearing Amplifiers** use a high sensitivity microphone that amplifies sound to be more distinct and clear. They are free to our patients. [Click here](#) to arrange.
- **Consider printing a communication board** ([multilingual versions available here](#)) specifically designed to support communication during COVID 19. Of note, this is not meant to replace an interpreter or other preferred mode of communication.
- **Consider use of White Board where alternative methods of communications are not available.**

### Blind/Visually Impaired
- If you are doing virtual visits, please do these via phone/telemedicine.
- **Screen reader software can be helpful** if a patient has access to programs such as JAWS. In these cases, they may be able to use virtual video.
- **Ask patients for preferred mode of receiving printed material:**
  - Enlarge or email all printed material for patients with limited vision.
  - **Braille** for patients who are blind or deaf-blind. [Click here](#) for how to arrange translation of printed material into Braille.
- **Announce yourself** when you walk in the room and describe aloud even small tasks you are doing.
- **Ask the patient what they can and cannot see and what would be helpful for communicating**, such as where to sit or stand and how close. Legal blindness does not mean the patient sees nothing.
- **Check to ensure the patient knows where important items are located** and keep important items in a consistent spot.

### Individuals with Autism, Developmental Disabilities or other Cognitive Impairment
- **A Communication partner** is a trusted individual who understands and facilitates a patient’s communication. Seek advice from them and allow them to remain with the patient.
- **Designate one staff person** to communicate information in specific interactions.
- **Display calm demeanor and body language.** Communication abilities deteriorate under stress, and patients with communication challenges are often attuned to the emotions of others.
- **Ask about a patient's preferred modes for self-expression AND for understanding:** verbal, written words, pictures, gestures, electronic device, sign language, communication partner.
- **Confirm accuracy of "Yes" and "No"** with communication partner before relying on this response.
- **Be visual** by demonstrating what you need to do, use hand counting, show pictures or photographs, or write a list of steps and check off as finished.
- **Use the words "first", "then" and "finished"** to help communicate the sequence of steps and duration of a medical task or test. Be specific and use simple language.
- **Offer choices** whenever possible - as simple as the order of vital signs, or to do medical task "now or in 5 minutes" - to reduce anxiety and encourage cooperation.
- **Pause** after giving specific and simple directions and look for cues the person has processed before proceeding.

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Content developed by the Partners Disability Task Force. For additional questions, please call your site’s COVID Disability Task Force Member ([Zary Amirhosseini](#)) at ([617-643-7148](#)).

Depending on disability some patients will need to be accompanied by a caregiver or a family member.

Refer to the PHS Visitor Policy [Here](#).