

Building Bridges Across Difference and Disability

Tip Sheet for Clients

*Adapted from Building Bridges Across Difference and
Disability, A Resource Guide for Health Care
Providers, August 2002*

What to Look For in a Health Care Provider

Choose a Health Care Provider who:

- Is willing to listen to and learn from your experiences of living with a facial or physical difference and/or disability but doesn't expect you to be their only source of information.
- Does not see you as sick, based only on your facial difference, physical difference, and/or disability.
- Respects your choice of how you refer to your facial difference, physical difference and/or disability and asks you what terms you use.
- Is willing to explain things to you in a manner that you understand. Writes out information or instructions in simple ways, if this is helpful to you.
- Asks about your concerns, needs, and expectations, and takes these seriously when talking with you and developing a health plan.
- Sees you as a unique individual and takes time to find out about aspects of your life that affect your health needs and choices.
- Provides services related to your health needs, for example your sexual and reproductive

health needs and preventative health needs.

- Provides information about different options, discusses with you what options you want to explore, and helps you make the best decision for yourself.
- Does not become upset if you do not agree with or follow her/his assessment or treatment plan.
- Is open to having a support person, such as a partner, family member, or friend, be present if you wish. Asks you for your own thoughts and feelings and/or if you would like to speak in private.
- Ensures that her/his helper is another health care provider when doing procedures that are personal, such as pelvic exams.
- Asks if and how you need assistance before giving it. Respects your decision to accept or refuse an offer of help and follows your instructions when giving assistance.
- Asks for permission before looking at and/or touching your body and provides information about what she/he is doing and why.
- Does not touch, lean on, or move your wheelchair, crutches, scooter, or walker unless you have given permission.

- Asks about your pickup time if you use accessible transportation, so that your visit can be completed before you have to leave. She/he makes sure you are informed if there is any delay.
- Gives you time to get from the waiting room to offices or treatment rooms and to prepare for examinations or procedures, such as undressing and getting on the table.
- Thinks about your comfort and abilities when carrying out practices and procedures and modifies them if necessary.
- Does her/his best to provide an accessible environment and is willing to listen to your suggestions to accommodate you. For example:
- A wheelchair accessible facility, including an accessible washroom and changing room;
 - A large open floor space, especially in the lobby and reception area;
 - A range of communication options such as TTY (TeleType Communication) and printed materials in Braille, and large print (not less than 18 font);
 - A height adjustable exam table.

If You Have Concerns or Feel that Your Needs Are Not Met: What You Can Do

- Talk to the person if you can. This often is the best way to resolve any problems or issues.

Talking with a health care provider can be intimidating. It may be helpful to write down what is bothering you and practice what you want to say, for example by role-playing with another person so that she/he can give you constructive feedback. You may want to think about bringing a support person you trust, such as a partner, family member, or friend, with you to the appointment.

- Write down or have someone write down for you what doesn't feel right to you. Include the dates and details of what your health care provider did or didn't do, what she/he said to you, and how you responded.
- If you speak to your health care provider, and as a result, you notice that there are no changes or things have gotten worse, note this in your records as well.

If things don't get better for you, you can:

- Find out what the complaint process is within the health agency by speaking to the person at the front desk, the manager, or supervisor. Follow the directions provided.
- Take your concerns to the person in charge such as a manager or supervisor within the unit or department. You may want to write a letter and keep a copy.
- Many institutions have patient advocates to deal with more serious client concerns throughout the institution. Consider speaking with the patient advocate. You may want to write a letter and keep a copy.
- Choose to find another health care provider, if possible.

If you still have concerns and want to go outside of the agency or institution for help, you can contact:

InfoAbility

InfoAbility provides information and referrals to legal clinics, counselling, public health, police, and community services for vulnerable adults and their supporters. Anyone in Ontario can contact this service. Their services are provided by phone.

Toll Free Phone: 1-800-665-9092

TTY Phone: 1-800-387-5559

Health Professional Regulatory Colleges

Professional organizations regulate many health care providers.

You can contact them and lodge a formal complaint, if you have *serious* concerns related to ethical or professional practices taken by your health care provider that result in putting your emotional and physical health at risk. They may investigate your complaint. Some actions could be: failure to practice in an ethical, legal, and/or professional manner; failure to obtain informed consent from you; serious breaches in confidentiality; failure to share specific needed information with you or other health care providers; inappropriate comments and/or touching; and sexual abuse.

Some examples of professional colleges in Ontario are the following: The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, which covers doctors and psychiatrists; the College of Nurses of Ontario which covers nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and registered practical nurses; and the College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers of Ontario which covers social workers and other service providers. For other colleges and if you live outside of Ontario, check the names of professional regulating organizations in your region.

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