



## American Association on Health & Disability

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# Tips for Mammography Staff: How to Serve Women with Disabilities More Effectively

## GENERAL TIPS FOR MAMMOGRAPHY STAFF ON HOW TO SERVE WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES:

- When **scheduling** the mammography appointment, ask the patient if she has a disability and if so, ask what accommodations she might need on the day of the appointment. For instance, if the patient has a physical disability, ask her if she can sit upright without assistance, lift and move her arms, transfer from her wheelchair or scooter, if applicable, and undress and dress without assistance. When needed, provide longer appointment times for the patient.
- On the **day of the mammography appointment**, the technologist should
  - Let the patient know what to expect.
  - Ask the client what assistance she needs.
  - Communicate directly with the patient. (If needed, any accompanying friend or caregiver may be included in the conversation.)
  - Assure the patient that any pain or discomfort experienced during the mammogram lasts only a few seconds.
  - Put notes in the patient's chart about the positioning techniques that worked and the accommodations that were provided. This will make the next mammogram easier.
- Provide on-going **training** to make all staff members aware of the condition and viewpoints of women with different kinds of disabilities. The training should portray women with disabilities as women first.

## TIPS ON HOW TO SERVE WOMEN WITH SPECIFIC TYPES OF DISABILITIES:

- **Blind or Visual Disabilities:** Tell the patient that you are in the room before approaching her. Ask if the patient would like a sighted guide to walk through the facility with her. State directions and describe materials clearly. Provide information in alternative formats, such as large print, computer disc or CD-ROM, Braille, or cassette tape. If the patient uses a Guide or Service Animal, allow the animal to accompany the patient; do not pet it or talk to it without asking permission from the patient.
- **Communication Disabilities:** Listen carefully and let the patient know if you don't understand her. Allow extra time for the patient to communicate with you and, if needed, find ways to facilitate communication, such as using paper and pencil or gestures.

- **Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** Learn how to use the Relay Telecommunications system, which allows you to communicate with a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, or has a speech disability. Provide a certified sign language interpreter, if requested by the patient. When using an interpreter, speak directly to the patient. With or without an interpreter, always face the person when you are talking so that your lips are visible. Speak clearly and slowly in an appropriate volume. If necessary, communicate in writing.
- **Emotional Disabilities:** Interact with individuals based on your experience with that person, not on assumptions about mental illness or a particular diagnosis. Speak calmly and clearly to the patient. Explain what will happen to her before it happens. If she is anxious, encourage and/or show her how to use relaxation and deep breathing techniques.
- **Intellectual Disabilities:** Greet and speak directly to the patient, using her name and plain language. Explain each step clearly before it happens, and calmly proceed slowly. Be prepared to provide the same information several times in different ways. If the patient has a hard time understanding what you are telling her, try showing her pictures, photographs, posters, and/or videos. If the patient is anxious, make sure the caregiver is present, and demonstrate the exam on the caregiver.
- **Physical/Mobility Disabilities:** When needed, have positioning supplies such as pillows, foam, chair, and tape ready in the mammography exam room before the exam. Clear paths of travel to reception area, restrooms, and mammography suite. If possible, sit down when talking with a woman in a wheelchair so you are at eye level. Ask the patient if and how you can help her when she transfers from her wheelchair to another chair, and listen to how she needs to be assisted. Always ask permission before moving or touching the patient or her assistive equipment. Be especially patient with women with spasticity (involuntary movements).

## RESOURCES

American Association on Health & Disability [www.aahd.us](http://www.aahd.us)

Breast Health Access for Women with Disabilities (BHAWD) [www.bhawd.org](http://www.bhawd.org)

Center for Research on Women with Disabilities [www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd](http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd)

The National Women's Health Information Center [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov)

North Carolina Office on Disability and Health/Chapel Hill, NC [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh)

Susan G. Komen for the Cure [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

**For more information, please contact Komen Project Coordinator at 301-545-6140 x203 or visit our website at [www.aahd.us](http://www.aahd.us)**

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