

What Healthcare Providers Need to Know

About Patients with Guide Dogs



Patients who are blind or have low vision may be accompanied by a guide dog when visiting healthcare facilities. Here are some helpful tips to ensure the experience goes smoothly for all.

Please Ignore the Guide Dog

Some patients rely on a guide dog to help them move about safely and independently. You can easily recognize a guide dog by its specialized harness with a long handle. When encountering a patient with a guide dog, please:

- Resist the urge to touch, talk to, or otherwise try to interact with the guide dog. Distracting the dog from its work can be unsafe.
- Avoid lengthy inquiries about the guide dog. While patients often enjoy a few quick remarks about their dog, most prefer to focus on the reason for their visit.
- Notify the patient if the guide dog gets in the way. If the dog moves from its place during an exam or procedure, ignore the dog and let the patient know.
- Alert the patient if you are fearful of dogs. An open discussion will help identify the best way to manage the situation.

Escorting Patients

When moving from one area to the next, some patients may prefer to grasp your left arm just above the elbow while they heel their guide dog. Others will direct their dog to “follow” behind you. When the patient chooses to follow:

- Walk at your normal speed unless the patient lags behind.
- Provide verbal instructions directly to the patient. Never call the dog or otherwise try to get it to follow you by making noises, clapping hands, etc. Likewise, do not grab the dog’s leash or harness in an attempt to “steer” the patient.
- Alert the patient before you make turns or go through doorways and other tight areas. Using terms like right and left are more helpful than “turn here” or “over there.”
- Maintain a conversation as you move along to provide the patient with audible clues to your location.