

Mobility Challenges

Definition

Mobility challenges include any disability that affects a person's capacity to move their body and get around. People with mobility challenges include those who use wheelchairs, walkers, scooters, and canes. Bariatric patients and aging patients may also experience mobility challenges.

Background Information

There are countless issues that can cause mobility challenges. Recent or old injuries, chronic conditions since birth, obesity, or neurologic problems are all examples. The specific disability depends on the type of injury. After a stroke, patients may lose the ability to move either the right or left half of their body. A motor vehicle accident may cause a patient be paralyzed and unable to use their legs and/or arms. Cerebral palsy can affect a person's ability to walk because of muscle contractures.

It's important to remember that there are many reasons for a patient to require an assistive device to get around. Only some of these conditions also affect cognitive ability.

Accommodating Patients with Mobility Challenges

- ▶ **Treat their mobility device as an extension of their body.** Just as you wouldn't lean on a patient's shoulder when talking with them, don't lean on their wheelchair.
- ▶ **Don't move devices without the patient's permission.** Not only is it rude to touch their device without asking, but it also could be dangerous. For example, if a patient doesn't realize you've moved their cane, they might go to lean on it and lose their balance.
- ▶ **Ask before providing assistance.** For example, don't grab a wheelchair and start pushing. Instead, ask the patient in the wheelchair if they'd like you to push them.
- ▶ If there is a specific location you are sending a patient for a test or procedure, **personally check to make sure it will be accessible** to the patient.
- ▶ Try to position yourself so you are **at the same level as the patient** while speaking. This may mean sitting in a chair opposite them.
- ▶ **Don't make assumptions.** Patients with mobility challenges are perfectly able to work, drive, and engage in sexual activity.
- ▶ **Don't rush patients.** Mobility challenges may make patients walk or travel less quickly. Let them go at a comfortable pace. Be patient with your patients!

Clinical Scenario

Michael is able to transfer from his wheelchair to a raised toilet seat independently. While he is a patient in the hospital, he finds that his bathroom has a standard low toilet seat. In order to maintain patient dignity, the nurse requests a raised toilet seat. If this was not possible, the nurse could also set up an adjustable-height commode in the bathroom.

Resources

ADA: Access to Medical Care for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities

<http://1.usa.gov/bDdeQK>

workSMART: What's the Safest Way to Handle Clients with Mobility Problems?

<http://bit.ly/W84UXB>

U.S. National Library of Medicine

<http://1.usa.gov/hoqrBC>

Job Accommodation Network

<http://askjan.org/media/Bipolar.html>

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Inclusive Health Care was developed by the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston and Boston Children's Hospital. We have decades of experience in workforce training and specialized consultation related to disability inclusion.

