What is a ‘reasonable adjustment’?
The aim to remove barriers that prevent disabled people from receiving an equal health service. Healthcare professionals are required to make reasonable adjustments to any of their provisions, criteria or practices that place a disabled person at a particular disadvantage compared to non-disabled persons.

The Law that supports this is the Equality Act 2010.

An example of making a reasonable adjustment:
Giving the patient with a learning disability the first appointment in the clinic, because they may not understand the reasons for waiting if the clinic is running late.

What are the health needs of people with a learning disability?
People with learning disabilities have far greater healthcare needs. They are more likely to have mental illness, long-term health problems, epilepsy and physical and sensory disabilities (DH, 2001).
They have an increased risk of early death when compared with the general population (Hollins et al. 1998).

What can all staff do to support people with learning disabilities in an acute hospital?
1. Enhance their communication skills; ask to see a patient's hospital passport.
2. Make reasonable adjustments.
3. Remember the person may need extra time and support when consenting to a procedure or investigations.
4. Support their carers.
5. Remember that children and adults with a learning disability can be vulnerable in hospital.
6. Ensure a Datix is completed when required.
7. Refer to the Acute Liaison Nurse Service.

Who can refer to this service?
Anyone can make a referral, we want to know about anyone with a learning disability (children and adults) attending our hospital so we can support you, them and their carers.

Contact us:
01872 254551 or Netpage via switchboard.
Please leave a message on answerphone if we are unavailable.

Further information:
For training and further information about learning disabilities contact Employee Support on RCHT.EmployeeSupport@Cornwall.NHS.UK or 01872 255148

Supporting patients with Learning Disabilities in an acute hospital
Guidelines for all staff

Review Date: 28 September 2018
Next Review: September 2019
Reviewed by: Jane Rees – Manager of Learning Disabilities and Autism team
**What is a learning disability?**
This is a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and learn new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), that starts before adulthood and has a lasting effect on development (Valuing People DH 2001).

There are varying degrees of learning disability:
- mild
- moderate
- severe
- profound
requiring different levels of support. A learning disability is a permanent condition.

**How does a learning disability impact on everyday life?**
The person affected may:
- be less able to understand and retain information
- require the use of simple language
- need unfamiliar things explained
- have swallowing difficulties
- be less able to communicate pain or discomfort
- rely on others to meet some, or all, of their basic needs or to maintain their safety.

**What are the indicators of a possible learning disability?**
These may include:
- Difficulties following instructions
- Difficulties understanding abstract concepts, like time and directions
- Difficulties with phrases in conversation, repetition and/or expanding on content
- Confusion about appointments
- doing more than one task at a time.

**What is the role of a carer in an acute hospital?**
Carers play an important part in supporting people with learning disabilities whilst in an acute hospital. They can:
- facilitate effective communication, including supporting the person to comprehend information
- provide emotional support; in particular during clinical investigations or treatment
- support the patient to make decisions and/or give consent.

**How can I support carers?**
You can do this by:
- ensuring they are aware that they have certain rights, including the right to a carer’s assessment
- allowing them to make choices about their caring role
- identifying and supporting people with carer’s responsibility
- keeping carers informed of the person’s condition.

For further information about supporting carers, see RCHT’s Carers Policy on the Document Library.

**How can I enhance my communication skills when I meet people with learning disabilities?**
- use straight forward and clear language
- use pictures and drawings to help explain. Use the hospital communication book, available in all wards and areas
- use family or carers to support the person
- look people in the face; make eye contact, so they can read your expressions.
- listen to the person and observe their body language
- use gestures and objects or sign language to help explain. Ask if they have a ‘hospital passport’
- if the patient is wearing hearing aids or glasses, make sure they are on before communicating with them
- be respectful and polite; do not shout or patronise
- give the family and patient time to ask questions.

Contact the Acute Liaison Nurse Service for Learning Disabilities for additional help and support on 01875 254551 or via net page.

**How can I support the patient?**

**How you can safeguard patients with learning disabilities in an acute hospital**
People with a learning disability can be vulnerable by the very nature of their disability.

If you have any safeguarding concerns please refer to RCHT’s Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Practical Information folder in your area, or contact the relevant Safeguarding Nurse via net page (Children’s or Adults) or the Liaison Nurse Service for Learning Disabilities.

**Ensuring safeguarding (Datix)**
- When reporting an incident or near miss using Datix, involving a person with a learning disability, ensure the Learning Disability box is ticked at the bottom of the screen.

**Ensuring safeguarding (Mental capacity and Consent)**
Patients may have difficulty understanding and retaining information you are giving them, please refer to RCHT’s Mental Capacity Policy or discuss with the Liaison Nurse service.