

Learning disabilities

Nicola Davies' care of people with learning disabilities improved after reading a learning zone article

As a person-centred planning facilitator at Mencap, my role is to support adults with learning disabilities. This includes identifying their health needs and aiding their communication with health professionals.

This article outlined some of the difficulties encountered by people with learning disabilities and provided strategies to improve communication.

I have observed poor communication between healthcare professionals and people with learning disabilities. Once, when supporting a client having an eye test, I had to inform the optician to give my client time to read the letters. To speed up the process the optician was reading out the letters to my client, who was capable of expressing himself if the time was taken to listen.

On accompanying my client to the dentist, I had to ask the health professional to talk to the client rather than me.

These situations helped me to identify areas for change and the article provided information to support these changes.

Effective liaison

Reading the article has given me strategies that I can use to improve health communication for those I support, such as asking for longer appointments and consultation times, in cases where this is appropriate. I will be sharing this approach with my line manager and colleagues to ensure that the individuals we support are given the time they

need to actively participate in health consultations.

The box listing examples of how healthcare terminology can be re-phrased into easier-to-understand language is a useful reminder of effective communication skills. It is especially pertinent to a woman I support who is preparing for a short hospital stay. She is anxious about the experience and I can now see the importance of ensuring hospital staff use terminology that is accessible to clients.

Easing anxiety

Individuals with a learning disability have often had negative experiences in the healthcare sector and for this reason avoid seeking health care. The article highlights that such negative experiences can be prevented. I would like to practice these preventive measures in my role as a support worker.

Since reading the article I want to learn more about augmentative and alternative communication systems (AACs),

READER'S PRACTICE PROFILE



This practice profile is based on NS336 Godsell M, Scarborough K (2006) Improving communication for people with learning disabilities. Nursing Standard, 20, 30, 58-65.

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and will ask my line manager about attending a course in this. Although the clients I work with have good verbal ability, I now am aware of the many advantages of learning AAC techniques. I would also like to access the training pack by Holt *et al* (2005) so that my colleagues and I can improve the level of support offered to clients **NS**

Reference

Holt G, Hardy S, Bouras N (2005) *Mental Health in Learning Disabilities: A Training Resource*. Third edition. Pavilion Publishing, Brighton.

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