

Introduction

The Equality Act makes it unlawful for disabled people to be treated less favourably than people to whom the disabilities do not apply although it does recognise limited circumstances in which there may be 'justification' for treating a disabled person less favourably.

Under Section 29 of the Equality Act, the Practice is legally obliged to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people have equal access to our services. Assistance Dogs are a vital and central element of support to many individuals with a disability.

This policy aims to:

- Minimise the restrictions of access to Assistance Dogs.
- Reduce the potential for distress to owners of and the Assistance Dogs themselves.
- Inform staff and other Patients on the requirements for Assistance Dogs.
- Minimise the time that Assistance Dogs and owners have to be separated.

Policy Statement

The SOUTHGATE MEDICAL GROUP is committed to providing services that are equally accessible and responsive to all sections of the community.

To that effect, Assistance Dogs are welcome to have access to all areas of the Practice **with the exception of any high risk area.**

This policy is intended to facilitate the best interests for Assistance Dog users, the Assistance Dogs themselves and our staff.

All Practice Staff should have a clear understanding of the Assistance Dog Policy and be aware of the different types of support provided by Assistance Dogs and the support needs of Patients when the Patient or visitor has been separated from the Assistance Dog. It is important that staff recognise the Assistance Dog is a working dog and should try to minimise distractions.

Patients with assistance dogs will be asked to wait in the interview room, to avoid distressing any other patients.

Definition of Assistance Dog

An Assistance Dog is one which has been specifically trained to assist a person with a specific disability and which has been qualified by one of the organisations registered as a member of Assistance Dogs (UK):

- Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Dogs for the Disabled
- Canine Partners
- Support Dogs

All Assistance Dogs will have formal identification and have been granted certification by the Department of Health on the basis that the dog's high standards of training, behaviour, health and welfare are such that it should be permitted to accompany its owner at all times and in all places within the United Kingdom.

Types of Assistance Dogs:

- **Guide Dogs** assist people who are blind or are visually impaired. They usually wear a white working harness with yellow reflectors and tags on their collar.
- **Hearing Dogs** assist people who are deaf or are hearing impaired.
A Hearing Dog communicates by touching its owner then indicating the source of the sound. The dog will alert its owner to a variety of sounds including door bell, smoke alarm, baby alarm, and alarm clock.
Practice Staff should be aware that Hearing Dogs may jump up onto their companion if telephones or alarms sound.
They wear a burgundy coloured coat with “Hearing Dog” written on the coat.
- **A Guide Dog with a red and white harness** indicates the owner is deafblind.
- **Assistance Dogs, Support Dogs or Dogs for the Disabled** assist people with many different tasks ranging from alerting people when their owner has a seizure, carrying items, loading and unloading washing machines and many other tasks. They wear a purple coloured coat.

Typical standards of behaviour of Assistance Dogs

Assistance Dogs are highly trained animals and distinguishable from pets in the following ways:

- Wearing a special harness and collar tag;
- Are carefully taught how to be well behaved in public places;
- Will sit or lie quietly on the floor next to its owner;
- Are trained to go to the toilet on command.
- Assistance Dogs are exempt from usual hygiene rules by the Institute of Environmental Health Officers and their owners are given a card to carry with them which explains this.

Hygiene and Cleanliness Guidance

When an Assistance Dog is / has been on the Practice Premises, particular attention will be given to hygiene and cleanliness.

Hand Hygiene

All staff must ensure good hand washing with soap and water or use of alcohol hand gel prior to and after any contact with an Assistance Dog. This will ensure the safety of all Patients and the Assistance Dog.

All Patients that come into contact with or handle an Assistance Dog will be encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water.

All Assistance Dog owners should wash their hands with soap and water after handling their Assistance Dog and before coming into contact with Patients.

General Cleanliness

All areas of the Practice where an Assistance Dog has been will be advised to the Practice Cleaning Staff who will ensure it is thoroughly cleaned with general purpose detergent.

Any equipment that has come into contact with the Assistance Dog should be cleaned with general purpose detergent or alcohol impregnated wipes where the use of general purpose detergent is inappropriate.

If necessary all animal body fluids should be treated as human waste. Personal Protective Equipment should be worn and all surfaces cleaned with 10,000 ppm HazTab solution.

General Guidance

Upon identifying that a Patient is the Owner of an Assistance Dog, the Practice will offer the Owner, accompanied by their Assistance Dog, to visit and walk around the Practice Premises to familiarise themselves with the layout and routes within the Premises, including access and egress routes and locations of toilets, fire exits and assembly areas, consulting rooms.

The Practice will liaise with the Owner to conduct repeat visits to act as 'refresher training' on an as-needed basis.

In the event that the Patient requires tests or treatment and prefers that the dog be left in a suitable area for a short period, the Practice will do its utmost to keep it in a quiet area, office or duty room while the Patient is having the tests or treatment.

During consultations and examinations, actual physical contact with an Assistance Dog by Practice Clinical Staff will be avoided if possible.

When it is known that an Assistance Dog will be accompanying a Patient for a consultation, the Practice will review other Patients scheduled to attend that particular session who have previously been identified as presenting a reasonable objection to an Assistance Dog being present in the area as a result of:

- Medical conditions or allergies associated with dogs
- Mental health issues with dogs including reasonable fear of dogs.

In this event, the Practice will do its utmost to make necessary arrangements for them to wait and / or have their consultation in a different room.

N.B. Objections under religious beliefs are not considered reasonable. (*This may be a concern for Muslim Patients as within the Muslim faith dogs are generally seen in a negative context. In 2003, the Sharia Council, based in the United Kingdom, ruled that a ban on dogs does not apply to Guide Dogs*).

Should an incident occur which involves an Assistance Dog, the Practice will create a 'Significant Event' record.

Assistance Dog Owner's Responsibilities

It is the owner's responsibility to ensure that the Assistance Dog's toileting and feeding requirements are met.

Members of staff are not responsible for the care of Assistance Dogs.

Practice Reception staff will advise the owner on arrival at the Practice that in the event an Assistance Dog fouls inside the Practice Premises, it is the owner's responsibility to report this to a member of staff so that arrangements can be made to clean and sanitize the area.

The owner should ensure the dog is fit and well and care regimes follow guidance provided by Assistance Dogs UK.

The owner should follow the Practice infection control policy, including the use of hand gel provided for all Patients and visitors.

Assistance Dogs are welcome to have access to the Practice.



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