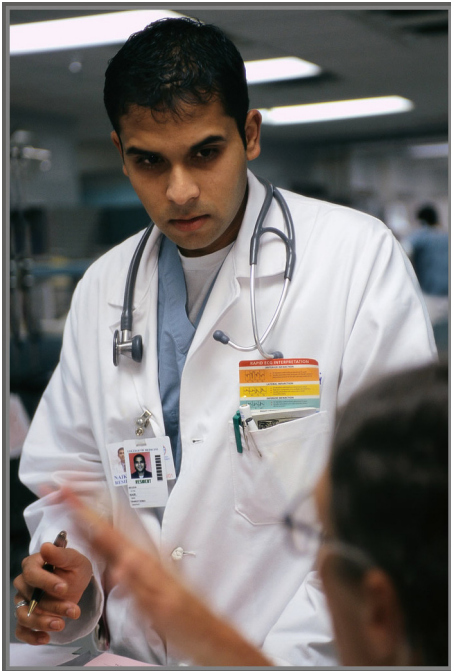


## Introduction

About 50 million people in the United States have a disability. According to the U.S. Public Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services, this represents more than 20% of Americans (Office of Disability, 2008). In Delaware, there are about 179,000 individuals with a disability.

Disability, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act, is any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, including but not limited to walking, talking,



breathing, hearing or caring for oneself. There are many types of disabilities and they can vary in duration and severity. Some individuals are born with a disability; others acquire a disability during their lifetime. Some disabilities are visible; others are not easy to see. It is likely that everyone will experience a disability at some point in their lifetime.

Communication is an important part of any relationship but especially between physician and patient. Effective communication is critical to proper diagnosis, appropriate medication dosing and ensuring patient compliance with a treatment regimen.

**Disability can impact communication.** Identifying a patient's disability and its potential impact on effective communication is the first step in reducing the risk of miscommunication. The type of disability – whether intellectual, sensory, mobility or mental health – will help determine the kind of accommodation needed. Usually minor accommodations can be made to ensure effective communication. There are many options for auxiliary aids and services to ensure effective communication. Health care providers and their staff can develop skills and acquire tools that will allow them to successfully provide accommodations to patients with disabilities.

This guide will provide information to help you communicate effectively with your patients with disabilities.

### PART 1 REQUIREMENT FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

This section provides an overview of a health care provider's responsibility to provide "effective communication" as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## **PART 2 COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES**

This section outlines best practices that providers can use to establish communication policies in their practices to achieve effective communication with patients. There are suggestions for respectful language, website accessibility, preparing materials in alternate formats, and the use of auxiliary aids.

## **PART 3 WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

This section provides practical tips on providing accommodations to individuals with different types of disabilities.