

Advice for hospitals and health professionals

1. Beware of missing serious illness. Important medical symptoms can be ignored because they are seen as part of someone's disability.
2. Be more suspicious that the patient may have a serious illness and take action quickly.
3. Find out the best way to communicate. Ask family, friends or support workers for help. Remember that some people use signs and symbols as well as speech.
4. Listen to parents and carers, especially when someone has difficulty communicating. They can tell you which signs and behaviours indicate distress.
5. Don't make assumptions about a person's quality of life. They are likely to be enjoying a fulfilling life.
6. Be clear on the law about capacity to consent. When people lack capacity you are required to act in their best interests.
7. Ask for help. Staff from the community learning disability team can help.
8. Remember the Disability Discrimination Act. It requires you to make 'reasonable adjustments' so you may have to do some things differently to achieve the same health outcomes.