



# INFORMATION SHEET

## Learning Disability Nurses

### What is a Learning Disability Nurse?



A Learning Disability Nurse is a qualified nurse who has additional specialist training, knowledge, and skills to work in partnership with families and their relative with a learning disability, to support them to optimise their health and well-being *throughout their lives*.

### What do they do?

Learning Disability Nurses work across a wide range of settings in the community and hospitals, usually as part of a multidisciplinary team (MDT). *They are a source of information and support and can advocate for your relative to ensure their health needs are met including making referrals or signposting to other services, e.g. psychology, occupational therapy.*

*Their valuable role remains unchanged during COVID-19.*

**Community Learning Disability Nurses** provide support and advice to families including: Maintaining good physical and mental health, access to health checks and screening, toileting, sleep, sexual health, positive behaviour support, end of life care. You can access a Community Learning Disability Nurse through a referral to the Community Learning Disability Team and the nurse may work with a range of different professionals to support your relative.

As well as nurses within learning disability teams there are two other types of Learning Disability Nurses, who work together but have slightly different roles, depending on where they are based or employed.

**Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurses** make sure that your relative is fully supported during any care and treatment required *in a hospital*.

Tip! Read the [NHS](#) and [CBF](#) information sheets about Going into Hospital.

**Primary Care Liaison Nurses** work specifically with *GPs and the services that work alongside the GP practice* (primary care). They help support your relative to access services.

Learning Disability Nurses also play an important role in providing advice, support and training to their colleagues.

All Learning Disability Nurses focus on supporting your relative to access good healthcare. They do this by:

- Ensuring healthcare settings make reasonable adjustments (Equality Act 2010). Reasonable adjustments can include arranging:
  - appointments during quiet periods, e.g., at the start/end of clinics
  - extra time for appointments
  - a quiet waiting area or using a pager so patients can wait in a place of their choice until they are ready to be seen
  - access to the information the healthcare staff need to support your relative eg using a hospital passport to ensure treatment is person centred. Here are some templates: [Covid-19 Grab & Go Form](#) or [MENCAP](#) or [Include Me Too](#).
  - resources to help you and your relative, e.g. planning a hospital visit using video clips of procedures, photographs for social stories
 (More information about reasonable adjustments is available [here](#).)

Tip! Make sure your relative's hospital passport is up to date. If you need help ask a professional involved in your relative's care and support.

- Checking appropriate use of Do Not Attempt to Resuscitate Decisions (DNAR).
- Providing support and advice about the Mental Capacity Act, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards applications and contributing to capacity assessments and best interest decision making.
- Acting as a key contact and communicating and liaising with families to ensure their voice is heard, including referrals to a professional advocate if required.
- Co-ordinating the whole process from appointments, treatment, admission and discharge.

For more information about the role of Learning Disability Nurses, please see [here](#).

## How can Learning Disability Nurses help with COVID-19?

**Community Learning Disability Nurses** may have to prioritise their caseload and change the way they provide support. For example, to follow social distancing rules, they may use technology, e.g. telephone, video calls and carry out face to face contact only when absolutely necessary.

**Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurses** are providing the same support but may have to prioritise emergency admissions. If your relative has a planned hospital appointment contact the hospital and ask about this service as soon as possible to discuss what support your relative needs, so there is time for this to be organised.

## How can they help with getting other health needs met?

As well as the current Covid-19 risks, checking and meeting your relative's general physical, mental and any existing health needs is really important. Some procedures and health checks may have been delayed due to the pandemic but these must be followed up and Learning Disability Nurses can provide advice, support, make referrals or signpost to help



with this. Ask your Learning Disability Nurse about existing or new health needs and appointments and they will be able to help access these.

We know that it may be difficult for your relative to get as much exercise as before and they may be missing their usual activities. This could have an effect on how they are feeling, or their sleep. Ask your Community Learning Disability Nurse if they know of other things that are happening locally that may help.



Read the CBF's Information Sheet Routine Healthcare During the COVID-19 Crisis [here](#) and the CBF's Health and Challenging Behaviour Information Sheet to understand how pain can affect your relative's *behaviour* [here](#).

A Community or Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurse will be able to arrange for your relative's records to be *digitally flagged*. This means that all healthcare professionals will immediately be able to see that they have a learning disability and what their personal needs are. Read more [here](#).

In addition to support from a Learning Disability Nurse, you can call your GP practice during opening hours if your relative needs support with a health need which is not an emergency or contact the NHS 111 service out of hours.

Specialist Learning Disability Nurses are not general nurses. This means they are unable to carry out procedures such as blood tests or routine health checks, which are typically carried out by nurses attached to GP practices. A Community Learning Disability Nurse will be able to support you to request reasonable adjustments for these, e.g., a home visit, desensitisation for blood tests.

## How can I find/contact my Learning Disability Nurse?

Ask your GP practice or other professionals e.g., social worker to help you with this.

Specifically, for Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurses, you can contact:

- NHS Patient Advice & Liaison Service for the hospital.
- Phone and ask the main reception of the hospital.
- If your relative needs to visit A&E, phone the department co-ordinator ahead of your arrival and ask if they have a Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurse.

Tip! Be prepared by finding out the contact details of your Learning Disability Nurses now. They can accept self-referrals from families.

Alternatively, search the internet entering the key words: Name of NHS trust and/or hospital followed by 'Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurse'.



## What can I do if there isn't one?

All areas will have some level of input from Community Learning Disability Nurses but not all hospitals have a Learning Disability Acute Liaison Nurse.

If the hospital providing your relative's care and treatment does not provide this service, you can ask for advice and support from:

- Your GP practice;
- The hospital's NHS Patient Advice & Liaison Service;
- The hospital's safeguarding team;
- For planned hospital appointments, phone the relevant department in advance and explain your relative's needs. You can do the same for A&E visits but the timescale to prepare for your relative will be tighter.

## Additional information



The CBF has produced a range of resources for families about Covid-19 [here](#).

CBF family support helpline: If you are a family carer of a child or adult with severe learning disabilities in need of support then please [contact our helpline](#).

All our information sheets are available to [download](#). If you need specific help relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, please see our information here: [Guidance for Families](#).

Resources produced by Learning Disability England about Covid-19 are [here](#).

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