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| **POLICY** | **Manual:** Administrative | **Section:**Admin | **Code No.:**A A012 | **Old Code No.:** |
| **Title:** Accessibility - Customer Service Regulation | **Original Effective Date:**Jan 22, 2010 |
| **Review/Revised Effective Date:**Nov 08, 2017 |
| **Next Review Date:**Dec 01, 2020 |
| **Cross Index:** A A011, A A013, A A014, A A015  | **Authoring Committee/Program/Dept:** Professional Practice | **Approved By:** AMC |

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Southlake Regional Health Centre commits to providing barrier free access to its environments, programs, and services.

Based on the requirements within the [Ontario Regulation 429/07 Accessibility for Customer Service](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/source/regs/english/2007/elaws_src_regs_r07429_e.htm) (AODA), 2005, Southlake ensures compliance with this Customer Service Regulation. Elements of the Customer Service Standard include policies or procedures addressing but not limited to:

* Training and Education
* Assistive Devices
* Service Animals
* Notice of Service Interruption
* Support Persons

**Training and Education:**

Education and training (as appropriate) regarding accessibility to services for individuals with disabilities is provided to all employees, students, volunteers, and physicians during orientation. A component regarding accessibility is included in the core curriculum to be completed annually.

Others service providers (e.g. contractors) who are not required to attend hospital orientation receive training and education from the department at Southlake employing their services. Such education shall be provided by the supervisor at Southlake who is overseeing the work of the service provider.

**Assistive Devices:**

Southlake supports the use of personal assistive devices for individuals with disabilities. An assistive device is defined as any device which allows persons with disabilities to obtain, use, or benefit from the provider's goods or services. Assistive devices are usually devices that people bring with them but may also include equipment available within the hospital for inpatient and outpatient use (e.g. hospital wheelchair).

Wherever possible, persons are permitted unlimited access to their assistive devices. Where the assistive device is not permitted (e.g. cell phone use in restricted areas), provisions are made to provide the service provided by the device.

Facility Operations ensures the good working order of all hospital-owned assistive devices. Staff are to contact Facility Operations or Environmental Services if they identify any hospital-owned assistive devices requiring repair or cleaning.

Assistive Devices include but are not limited to:

* **Physical assistive devices -** cane, walker, wheelchair, electric scooters, grasping devices
* **Communicative Devices -** interpreters,hearing devices, laptop computers, personal data assistant (PDA), cell phones
* **Visual Aids -** magnification devices, Braille devices, white canes, glasses
* **Medical Assistive Devices -** personal oxygen tanks

**Service Animals:**

Service animals are accommodated at Southlake and are permitted in areas commonly accessed by the public such as retail and restaurant services. Service animals are restricted from entering the following areas:

* Food preparation and food storage areas
* Medication preparation or storage areas
* Clean or sterile supply storage areas
* Isolation rooms
* Restricted access areas such as procedure and treatment rooms

Owners must make arrangements in advance for alternate care of the animal if they plan to enter an area which precludes animals.

Eviction or exclusion of a service animal can only occur for reasons that are **demonstrable**, not speculative. Assumptions or speculation about how the animal is likely to behave based on past experience with other animals are not valid. If another person complains about the presence of a service animal (because of allergies, fear, or other reasons not related to the animal's demeanour or health), the person with objections to the animal should be separated and/or leave the area where the animal is located. Each situation is to be considered individually and in consultation with the owner. Discussion with Risk Management is recommended in difficult situations.

The AODA designates an animal as a service animal if:

1. It is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his/her disability; or
2. If the person provides a letter from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability

Service animals assist people with disabilities in their activities of independent living. They are not considered to be pets but rather an auxiliary aid similar to the use of a cane, crutch or wheelchair. A patient accompanied by a service animal is not required to disclose the nature of their disability.

Examples of service animals include:

* A guide animal, trained by authorized vendors to service for mobility, or individuals with vision loss, blindness or partial sight.
* A hearing animal, trained to alert a person with significant hearing loss or who is deaf when a sound occurs, such as a knock on the door or fire alarm.
* Special skills animals, trained to assist a person who has a mobility or health disability. Duties may include carrying, fetching, opening doors, ringing doorbells, activating elevator buttons, steadying a person while walking, helping a person up after a fall, emotional support, etc. Service animals sometimes are called assistance animals.
* A seizure response animal, trained to assist a person with a seizure disorder. The animal's service depends on the person's needs. The animal may go for help, or may stand guard over the person during a seizure. Some animals have learned to predict a seizure and warn the person.
* A companion animal or emotional support animal that assists persons with psychological disabilities. Emotional support animals can help alleviate symptoms such as depression, anxiety, stress and difficulties regarding social interactions, allowing individuals to live independently and fully use and enjoy their living environment.

**Notice of Service Interruptions:**

Service Interruption notifications are provided by Southlake as per Regulation 429/07 which deems that,"if, in order to obtain, use or benefit from a provider's goods or services, persons with disabilities usually use particular facilities or services of the provider and if there is a temporary disruption in those facilities or services in whole or in part, the providers shall give notice of the disruption to the public." Notifications must include:

* Reason for and information about the disruption
* Anticipated duration
* Alternative services or facilities/routes, if available
* Contact name and number for information relating to the service interruption

**Support Persons:**

Southlake recognizes that support persons may be utilized by individuals with disabilities to facilitate their access to goods or services at Southlake. The support person does not need to have special training or qualifications.

A support person is defined as "a person who accompanies a person with disabilities in order to help with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to goods or services. A support person may be a paid support worker, a volunteer, a friend, or a family member. **A support person may be identified as such by the person with the disability and is not required to carry or produce documentation**."

Wherever possible, a support person is allowed unlimited access to the person with the disability.

When a support person is permitted access to an area where exposure to confidential information of other patients may be more likely to occur, measures must be taken by staff in that area to ensure such exposure is minimized. Areas where confidential information may be more visible include, but are not limited to, controlled access areas such as surgical suites, procedure rooms, PACU, and recovery rooms. Where possible, prior to the arrival in areas where exposure of confidential information may be more likely to occur, the support person will be asked by staff to sign a *Confidentiality Agreement for Patient Escorts Accessing a Controlled Access Area* (form #SL0638) in accordance with Southlake’s Confidentiality policy (Special Visitors section).

**References:**

* [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_05a11_e.htm) (AODA)
* <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191>
* [Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC)](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90h19_e.htm)