



## **The Expert Parent Practical Tips For Using the NHS**

### **Visiting the GP**

Visiting the GP with your disabled child can be a very stressful event and often parents by pass this and go straight to Emergency services or a familiar hospital ward.

The following tips and considerations might help you when with planning and attending future visits to the GP and improve their knowledge and understanding of your child.

Before you go think about...

The time of the appointment

- Can YOU attend? is the surgery quiet?, is your child's usual doctor available?

Where can you wait?

- Is there somewhere quiet to sit, can you leave a mobile number with receptionist and wait in the car or walk around the block?

Write a card to give to the receptionist outlining the additional needs of the child. The parent carer then doesn't have to discuss it in front of others.

### **Top Ten Tips when visiting the GP**

1. Get to know the reception staff – they may be able to take into account your child's condition when booking an appointment e.g. At the beginning of surgery before the waiting room gets too busy. They can also suggest the best place to wait if you child gets distressed in noisy places. Receptionists can explain the appointment system at your practice – most surgeries have pre-booked appointments and urgent 'same day' appointments. Some surgeries also offer telephone appointments which are useful if you

need to discuss problems which don't need the doctor to see your child.

2. Get to know your GP. Find out which GP you are registered with by asking at reception. Hospital letters will usually be sent to the GP you are registered with. If you regularly see a doctor you are not registered with, ask if you can swap to their care.
3. If you are not happy with your GP, look on the practice website to see if there is an alternative doctor. Your Health Visitor can also advise you. You may find a GP who has an interest in an area such as Child Health or Learning Disabilities. You could even consider whether a doctor has their own children – they may be more sympathetic to your needs.
4. Make a routine appointment with your GP when you and your child are well. This will give you an opportunity to discuss your family and your child's unique circumstances without the pressure of an urgent medical problem that needs dealing with.
5. Give them information. If you feel they don't know enough about your child's condition, offer information and have it scanned into your child's notes. If you have to see another GP in an emergency, they will also have access to information you have given. You could consider general information about your child's condition (such as from a support website) and specific problems related to your child. Remember, not all GPs will have worked extensively in Paediatrics. They may not have treated children with your child's condition before.
6. Whenever possible, try to see the same doctor each time. You can build a good rapport and understanding and they won't ask the same questions over and over again.
7. Tell them what you need. GPs can write supportive letters for DLA and charity grant applications or housing problems, etc. They can act as your advocate, such as writing to speed up appointments or emailing a consultant about medication changes. They may not be able to answer questions about complicated medical problems related to your child's condition, but they can contact someone who can!

8. Make sure the hospital and community services have your GP's name and address. Ask hospital staff/community therapists to send a copy of the clinic letters or reports to your GP. Often, GPs **do not** routinely receive these letters (especially if your child receives medical care/therapy through their school).
  
9. Remember – you are an expert on your child. If your child is unwell, tell the doctor. Your GP should view new symptoms in the same way they would if your child did not have a disability. **New symptoms should not just be put down to your child's disability without looking for another cause.**
  
10. Remember you are a carer! Do not overlook the pressures on you and your health. Carers often forget to look after themselves. GP's now have a duty to identify all patients with caring responsibility to ensure that their health needs are monitored and met. Don't ignore your own health, ask for help when you need it! GPs can offer advice on problems such as stress, low mood or poor sleep. They can also offer talking therapy and tell you about local services for carers.

**Having a good GP can be invaluable. They should take into account your concerns and ideas so that you can make joint decisions about your child's healthcare. Many health centres are now establishing Patient Participation Groups to enable patients to become more involved in how practices are run. Ask at the reception if you are interested in joining a group.**