

## Approaching and Communicating with Patients and Clients

### - A Wheelchair User

There are many reasons why a person may need to use a wheelchair, either temporarily, or permanently. Wheelchairs help people adapt to or compensate for mobility impairments that result from many different conditions, for example: spinal cord injury; stroke; amputation; muscular dystrophy; cerebral palsy; multiple sclerosis; heart disease etc.

- The key concept is to focus on the person, not on their disability.
- Don't be tempted to talk only to the person pushing the chair.
- Don't assume that because the user is mobility impaired that they are unable to understand or speak.
- It is appropriate to shake hands with a person who has a disability, even if they have limited use of their hands or wear an artificial limb.
- If possible sit or crouch down so that you are at eye level when talking.
- Don't crowd the person, bend over them or shout at them. Don't hang or lean on a person's wheelchair. A wheelchair is part of their personal or body space.
- Be aware of where your PAT Dog or PAT Cat (especially paws or tails) may be in relation to the wheels of the chair should the person need to move without warning.
- If a wheelchair user "transfers" out of the wheelchair to a chair or bed, do not move the wheelchair out of reach.
- It is OK to use expressions like "running along" or "let's go for a walk" when speaking to person who uses a wheelchair. It is likely they express the idea of moving along in exactly the same way.

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