That Sinking Feeling: People with Disabilities in Hospital Wards

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**Plain English Summary**

# Introduction

This article is about people with disabilities and what they feel when they are in a hospital ward. Every person who comes to a hospital has the right to be treated with respect and to be treated as best as is possible. People with disabilities also deserve such treatment.

* 1. **Access to Health Services in Israel**

This study was conducted in Israel. Israel has a public health system. That means anyone can go to a doctor or a hospital even if they have no money or insurance.

Israel has a specific law that refers to people with disabilities – ‘The Equal Rights for People with Disabilities Law’ (1998). This law states that there should be no discrimination against people with disabilities and that they have the same rights as people without disabilities. In addition, the law state that public places must be accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. **Accessibility** is defined as the possibility of reaching a place, moving inside it from one service (or place) to another, enjoying the service and receiving accessible information that refers to the specific service.

The Israeli law also states that people with disabilities must have access to services and proceedings provided inside buildings. This new concept is defined as **‘service accessibility’.**

* 1. **Patient-Centered Care and People with Disabilities in Health Services**

PCC stands for Patient-Centered Care. The meaning of this concept is that people who go to a doctor or hospital will receive treatment in a way that respects them and fits what they need and what they want. ‘The Equal Rights for People with Disabilities Law’ (1998) In Israel also refers to and demands service accessibility in all public spaces and services. Yet, those requirements are still not being implemented optimally in health system and health services in Israel.

# Research Method and Design

To check what people with disabilities think about the hospital services they received we spoke to 18 persons with disabilities. This was a relatively small study, but it produced rich data, which helps us to understand people’s experiences.

# Findings

# In this study we discovered four new things:

# People with disabilities who are in a hospital sometimes do not have enough accessibility. For example, sometimes the hospital bed does not match their size, abilities or needs.

# People with disabilities who are in hospital sometimes do not receive an accessible service. For example: no one explained to them the procedure they are going through in a way that they can absorb information and understand it.

# Sometimes doctors give people with disabilities the wrong treatment because they don't know their impairment and their needs well enough.

# Sometimes doctors or nurses do not know how people with specific disabilities communicate their views, or how to support them to express their preferences. Sometimes they don't speak to them in a positive/polite way, sometimes they ignore the patient.

# Discussion

This research helps us understand the common difficulties that arise when people with disabilities use services in public hospitals. This research also revealed that when the hospital is not accessible enough or when the attitude of the medical staff is not good, it makes people with disabilities feel uncomfortable, confused, stressed and sad. It can also result in patients receiving the wrong treatment and even life-threatening treatment. In conclusion, we can say that this research proves the need for accessible treatment in hospital services for people with disabilities. In order to implement the accessible treatment in this field we think it is necessary to explain to the staff working in the hospitals how to make health services accessible for all. Better training is needed. Accessible treatment will help patients receive, and staff accomplish, efficient and high-quality treatment.