

The RCN Peer Support Service guide

For members affected by disability on placement

ADVICE AND INFORMATION



Language

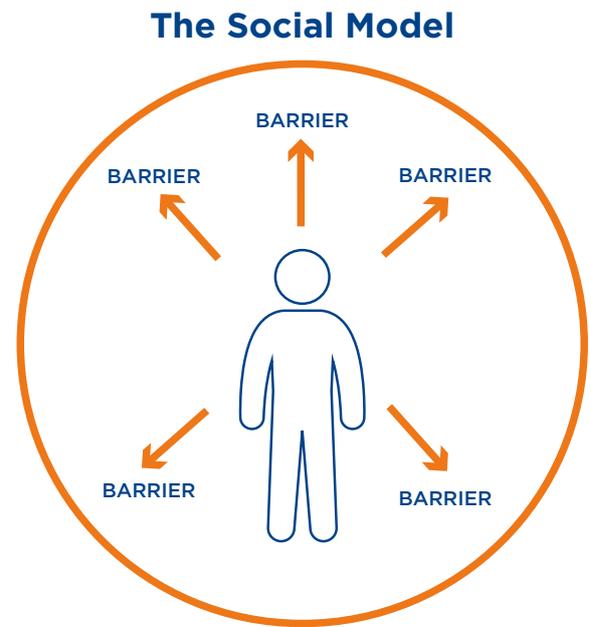
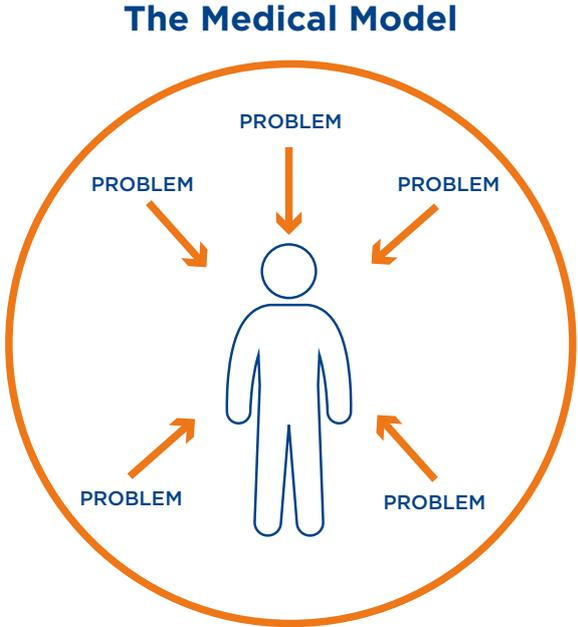
In this guidance we use the words associated with the social model way of looking at disability.

Under the social model, you are disabled by environments and attitudes – not by your health condition or impairment.

This is different to the approach traditionally used by medical professionals, where the individual’s impairment is the root cause of their problems.

Whereas some people might say that you “have a disability” under the social model we would say that you “are disabled” – by attitudes, environments and procedures which leave you at a disadvantage compared to your peers who don’t have an impairment.

For this reason, in the guidance we use “Impairment” to refer to any physical or mental health issue that you may have, rather than “disability”. You will have your own way of referring to your impairment and facing exclusion, and should use this.



Why does it matter?

As you would expect, research has shown that having a good relationship with placement staff enhances the learning experience. Being able to respond appropriately to the needs of those with different abilities is essential to forging a relationship with them.

As well as being a legal obligation, supporting students to access healthcare education enriches the student body and, upon graduation, the workforce.

As the NHS and independent sector employers are now considering how to recruit and retain staff with impairments, including students with impairments on healthcare courses is essential to changing the outdated perceptions around working with a disability that persist in medical environments.

Most importantly, excluding potential students because they have a health issue or impairment means missing out on talented individuals with skills such as empathy, resourcefulness and commitment.

Who knows best?

We advocate that all potential solutions be discussed with the individual student in question. After all, you are the best expert when it comes to your own experience of disability.

What you are probably less familiar with, certainly at the outset of a course of study, are the placement environments, who you will be working with and their expectations of you.

That is why it is important to be proactive and speak to fellow students, your university disability support, occupational health, your union if you have one, condition specific charities that offer advice around studying and employment.

It is also beneficial wherever possible to share information and meet in advance of starting a placement. Different education providers have different processes for communicating between the academic and placement aspects of the course.

You must be aware that for your protection there are strict rules around sharing information about your disability. So if you tell one person at your university, that doesn't mean that this is common knowledge across your classes and placements. We will look at the pros and cons of disclosing a disability later.

The Equality Act 2010 (EA 2010)

In England, Scotland and Wales the Equality Act 2010 outlines the duties of employers and education providers in regards to supporting individuals who have disabilities. In Northern Ireland the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) is the equivalent.

Under the EA 2010, a person is considered to be disabled if they meet a legal definition of disability;

'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'

Those who meet this criteria are considered to have a "protected characteristic" and the legislation within the Act aims to ensure that they have equality of opportunity at work, in education and as a customer.

For students this means that publicly funded education providers including universities and colleges are breaking the law if they treat you differently because of a disability. This is known as discrimination. To prevent discrimination, providers should:

- Treat students with a disability the same as other students. This includes prospective and former students.
- Make "reasonable adjustments" to policies, procedures and physical environments, provide equipment, services and support. This is to ensure that a student with an impairment is not placed at a substantial disadvantage and, as far as possible, has the same access as a student who is not disabled.
- Take steps to improve the accessibility of education for all people with a disability; not only when prompted by individual needs. This includes building alterations and changes to curriculum delivery.

You can't expect adjustments to be made by your education provider if they don't know, or have reasonable grounds to suspect, that you have a disability. However they should also do all they can (reasonably) to give you opportunities to let them know.

See <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-technical-guidance-further-and-higher-education>

Privately funded education providers also have certain duties – as a service provider.

The Special Education Needs and Disability Order (SENDO)

Under the SENDO the same definition of disability is used, and the order has the same aim of protecting people who meet the definition from discriminatory practice.

See <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Individuals/DisabilityDiscrimShortGuide2011.pdf>

Or contact the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland <http://www.equalityni.org/Home> for further information

Should you disclose a disability?

You are not obliged to disclose your disability unless it could cause risk – it is your choice.

However you are also required to undertake an occupational health assessment to ascertain that you are able to fulfil the competency standards of the course and of the relevant regulatory body (NMC). This will remain confidential to the Occupational Health Service – unless there are concerns around patient or pupil safety or you will require reasonable adjustments on placement, then this will be shared with your education provider.

If you choose not to disclose, you will not be protected by the Equality Act (unless you can prove that your education provider had “reasonable grounds to suspect” that you were disabled).

Aside from the additional rights that disclosure brings, other benefits include:

- Being able to be “the real you” and not having to hide your condition/impairment
- Having access to more support
- Contributing To changing attitudes in the healthcare sector
- Demonstrating to everyone the possibilities for other disabled people.

What are Reasonable Adjustments?

This guidance concentrates on the duties of publicly funded education providers and how they can make changes and additions to their provision to improve accessibility. These are referred to as “reasonable” because the needs of the individual student are balanced against the implications for the HEI such as cost as well as the ability of the student to fulfil the requirements of the course and how effective adjustments will be in removing barriers to equal participation.

Adjustments can be in three areas:

- Physical features
- Aids and services
- The way things are done at the university eg. Policies, rules (In legislation this is referred to as “provision, criterion or practice”)

Sometimes awareness or equipment training for staff or students may also be considered.

Universities will have a Disability Support office that can work with you to identify adjustments that will help you. They will be well versed in arranging support for the academic setting, and can advise you on how to make an application for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) if this is appropriate.

It can be challenging to anticipate what adjustments will be effective and appropriate on placement- which is a different environment to academic setting. You must be able to demonstrate the skills and competencies required for your profession and so reasonable adjustments should help you to fulfil your placement duties; not alter them. Occupation Health are well placed to help you identify and adjustments needed.

Disabled Student’s Allowance (DSA)

DSA is non means test funding for equipment, non-medical assistants, travel and other costs – if these needs are caused by your impairment and are required specifically to participate in the course of study (equipment that you need anyway and that most people have, eg. a smartphone, would not be funded). A needs assessment identifies the support that you require, and this considers placements as well as academic settings. Most practice adjustments (time etc.) do not cost any money and as a consequence are not funded.

Students with more precise needs such as needing a BSL interpreter or a piece of equipment should explore DSA funding. It is important you are able to explain what you might need in all aspects of your course (university and clinical practice). The university will then consider funding any outstanding costs not covered by DSA.

DSA is for UK residents, but if you are an EU resident who has lived here 3 or more years prior to study commencing, or an international student with settled status or indefinite leave to remain, you may be eligible – so seek advice if in doubt. Funding bodies have their criteria online so this is a good place to start.

You should start the application process for DSA before you start your course as the process takes time. Funding is transferable so you can still start, even if you don't know which university you are going to yet – apply using your prospective choice. However if during your course you realise you need equipment it is possible to apply at any time. You have to apply again for each year of your course.

Existing students part way through a nursing course receive DSA as part of their NHS bursary. An application for DSA is made through the NHS BSA Bursary Online Support System.

For students starting a new course, the first step is to fill out the student form (which can be done online) and return this to your funding agency along with any evidence they require. If you're not sure which is your funding agency, consult a disability adviser at your prospective university or find information online.

Once your application is assessed, if it is agreed that you have a need for assistance, you then have an appointment with a Needs Assessor. They will establish what will help you, and put this proposal back to the funding agency. Once the funding agency approve this proposal (or parts of it), they will send you the agreement that details how to put support in place.

Here's some tips to be prepared for placement:

Check what your university's procedure is for liaising with placement providers. Don't assume that they will let your placement know about any impairments you disclose to them – they can't do this without your permission.

Be proactive and positive about your needs – try and arrange a visit ahead of your placement so that you can identify what may help. This is also a good opportunity to try out your travel route and familiarise yourself with where you will be working.

Include your requirements in your personal learning plan; with input from both the placement provider (eg. Your mentor) and the university.

You are not obliged to disclose your disability unless it could cause risk – but it will be difficult to obtain assistance during the course if you find that you are struggling and you haven't disclosed.

Ask what health and safety procedures are in place – if you are worried that there are potential risks associated with your impairment or related adjustments, say so.

Check that any equipment you will use meets the required data protection standards (set locally). Most commonly this will apply to recording devices.

Do you need more time to learn environments or procedures, ask if it is possible to have more time at the start of placements.

Make a plan to help you prepare for placement – make sure you know the dates of your reviews. If you think you will need more support – make sure you have a contact that you can call on.

If information is supplied in a way that doesn't suit you – eg. the type is too small or the information needs breaking down - ask if this can be changed.

The NMC

If you are studying to be a nurse, once qualified you need to be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in order to practice.

You are required to demonstrate “good health” as a practicing nurse under the NMC code of conduct. This is described as being “capable of safe and effective practice without supervision” and not that you must be free from impairments.

Whilst studying, it is your responsibility to inform your education provider of any condition or impairment that may affect your ability to practise safely and effectively. This is reaffirmed annually throughout your course when you are required to declare your good health.

Moving from study to employment

Whether or not you can meet the requirements to practice of the NMC (or other regulatory body), if you are living with a long term condition or impairment it is important to be realistic about your capacity for work once you have graduated. Working in healthcare is different from working on study placements in some ways and with different (sometimes less) support.

Being accepted on to a course is not an indicator that you will be able to practice in that area upon graduation – don't assume that this is a consideration of the providers. Although many providers will be aware that your reason for applying is because you would like ultimately to work in this area, if you have concerns about the feasibility of moving from study to employment, discuss these before accepting your place.

This is not meant to put you off – but rather to help you be prepared by having frank, open discussions so that you can work with providers to find solutions.

The Peer Support Service **guide to reasonable adjustments** talks more about disability and employment.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia are now often referred to as neurodiversity. Dyslexia is a high incidence disability, which according to the British Dyslexia Association is present in 10% of the UK population.

Dyslexic traits include being great at empathising, team work and specialist knowledge ... all things that make great nurses!

Dyslexia is covered by the Equality Act 2010 but you will need to pay for an assessment – if you haven't had one before you enter higher education your university will be able to advise you on how to proceed, and often offer subsidised tests.

See:

British Dyslexia Association website
<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic/students-in-fe-and-he>

Peer Support – member's preferred equipment factsheet (available on our web area)

RCN toolkit – Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia for more advice.

Useful Resources

Your student's union should be your first port of call.

RCN members should call RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100 for support with issues on placement including discrimination.

Disability Rights UK – Student helpline
<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/helplines/disabled-students-helpline>

NMC student guidance <https://www.nmc.org.uk/education/becoming-a-nurse-or-midwife/when-studying-to-be-a-nurse-or-midwife/>

If you have a specific condition, find a related national registered charity online – many of them have guidance on employment that can be applied to placements, some have student specific guidance.

Mental ill health

If you are experiencing stress, anxiety or depression seek help sooner rather than later. The RCN's Counselling service can help you find a way forward [link]

The RCN has also produced Healthy You guidance which explores the benefits of self care

<https://www2.rcn.org.uk/newsevents/campaigns/healthy-workplace/healthy-you>

Mind student guide

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life/managing-independent-study/#.WYRWJYTyuUk>

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes
excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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RCN Direct
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

Published by the Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London
W1G 0RN

020 7409 3333

December 2017
Publication code 006 665



Royal College
of Nursing