



## ***Neurodiversity: Insights for Teaching in Health Professions Education***

Session summary for the R&R Series webinar hosted on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025, with guest speakers Cheryl Holmes, Sonia Butterworth, Elisabeth Baerg Hall, Wendy Norman, Xin Mei Liu, Rita Shah and Laura Bulk

### What is Neurodiversity?<sup>1,2</sup>

- **Neurodiversity:** Refers to a broad array of different neurology (brains) in the human population
- **Neurodiverse:** Refers to a group – those with a ‘broad array of different neurology’, including neurotypical people. Does not refer to individuals.
- **Neurodivergent:** Refers to someone whose brain differs from the perceived neuro-majority.

#### Neurodiverse Professionals Are Often\*...

- Able to wear many hats
- Highly principled and passionate about care
- Deeply focused on the patient/client in the moment
- Able to think quickly and calmly in busy or chaotic times
- Able to write detailed chart notes and show great proficiency with storytelling
- Keen to learn and seek depth in information
- Be persistent with problem-solving

#### Neurodiverse Students Can Benefit From \*...

- Early intervention
- Universal supports
- Breaking down skills
- Help addressing time agnosia
- Assistance with accountability
- Clear communication
- Clear definitions of expectations

\*These lists are not exhaustive

### What are Accommodations?

Accommodations are adjustments and modifications or supports to remove access barriers; they aim for equitable access, not an advantage or guaranteed success. Accommodations are individualized to maintain learning outcomes, based on medical expertise, legal precedent, evidence-based practice, and the student’s lived experiences.

### Centre for Accessibility

The [Centre for Accessibility \(CFA\)](#) facilitates disability-related accommodations and programming initiatives designed to remove barriers for students with disabilities and ongoing medical conditions in all aspects of university life.<sup>3</sup>

#### What does the CFA do?

- Supports students with permanent or long-term disabilities or medical conditions
- Facilitates accommodations under [Policy LR7](#), BC Human Rights Code, and Accessible BC Act
- Advises instructors, faculties, and campus partners on systemic disability and accommodation issues

Recognizing that not every learner with a disability registers with the CFA, many of the learners who do register self-identify as neurodivergent. In recent years, there has been significant growth in registrants seeking clinical accommodations.

## Scenario Discussion

### Scenario

A learner with whom you will be working has formal accommodations as outlined in a letter you received from the program. As with all learners with accommodations you are not aware of the reason why or of their diagnosis.

You have been provided with the following information for their clinical work:

- Occasional absences for medical appointments (ideally to be scheduled when least disruptive to clinical duties)
- Workday to be no longer than 8 hours, except on call\* days
- Call\*
  - No overnight call (can have an “on call” shift until 11pm and weekend day call shifts)
  - Maximum of 2 call shifts for every 7-day period
  - Will require a post-call day after any call shift
- Breaks - Minimum 5-10 minutes break every 1-2 hours as needed

### How do you approach working with the learner?

\*Call is when a health care provider is scheduled to be available to respond to patient/health care demands at any time during a set period, typically overnight.

## Program-specific considerations

- **Undergraduate Medical Education (UGME)** - Since the curriculum is competency-based, students must have enough time to demonstrate competencies AND gain adequate clinical exposure to meet the learning objectives of the rotation. If either of those principles are not possible within the student’s accommodations, then the student needs additional time on the rotation. This can sometimes be accomplished by additional weekend days, clinical time arranged during vacation, day call, etc.
- **Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME)** – The program reviews the accommodations and discusses the adjustments to rotations with the resident and sites to ensure sufficient opportunity to gain experience and demonstrate required competencies. It would be expected that call would also occur on weekends or perhaps the number would be increased. It would be expected that the overall training duration would be significantly increased. If this was an ongoing accommodation, training in some specialties might not be possible.
- **Health Professions Education (HPE)**– There is a lot of variability across programs; however, for many the regulatory/licensing bodies require a certain number of fieldwork hours. Consider being creative regarding how the hours are achieved. For example, are there things the student can do at home if that would be better for them? Can simulation be used? Etc.

## Resources

### [Watch the R&R session recording](#)

### ADHD Resources

- [Assessment for ADHD](#)
- Book: Scattered Minds: The Origins and Healing of Attention Deficit Disorder by Gabor Maté
- Book: Your brain’s not broken by Tamara Rosier

- This Changed My Practice, [“Adult ADHD - Practice Tip”](#)
- This Changed My Practice, [“Women with ADHD - Practice Tips”](#)
- Mammoliti M, Richards-Bentley C, Ly A, Nguyen M. Understanding attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in physicians: workplace implications and management strategies. CJPL. 2021;7(4). doi:[10.37964/cr24742](#)
- Build a Better Core: Executive Function Strategies for Physicians with ADHD is an ongoing program focusing on skills and support. For more information on this MSP-funded program, contact Dr. Baerg Hall. email: [contact@ebhallmd.com](mailto:contact@ebhallmd.com)

## General Resources

- Book: Demystifying Disability: What to know, what to say, and how to be an ally by Emily Ladau
- Neilson S. Professional stigmatizations. CMAJ. 2024;196(34):E1173-5. doi: [10.1503/cmaj.241029](#)
- CMAJ Podcasts – Breaking the Mold: embracing neurodiversity in medicine – Dr. Shane Neilson. [Webpage](#) and [Spotify Link](#)
- Shaw, SCK, Brown M, Jain NR, George RE, Bernard S, Godfrey-Harris M, Doherty M. When I say...neurodiversity paradigm. Med Educ. 2024. doi: [10.1111/medu.15565](#)
- Book: [Disability as Diversity: A Guidebook for Inclusion in Medicine, Nursing, and the Health Professions](#)
- [#DocsWithDisabilities](#) Podcast (particularly episodes 99 & 95)
- Keynote Presentation: [“Creating Inclusive Training Programs for Trainees with Disabilities”](#) by Dr. Lisa Meeks at UBC Faculty of Medicine Education Day
- [Strengthening Accessibility & Inclusion within Professional Programs \(free annual virtual conference\)](#)
- Presentation: [“Accommodations in the Real World\\*: Accessible Clinical Education”](#) by Sarah Knitter (UBC Centre for Accessibility)
- [Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities](#)
- [Autistic Doctors International \(ADI\)](#)
- Duong D, Vogel L. Untapped potential: embracing neurodiversity in medicine. CMAJ. 2022;194(27):E951-2. doi:[10.1503/cmaj.1096006](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Hartman, D. Et. Al. (2023). The Adult Autism Assessment Handbook: A Neurodiversity-Affirmative Approach. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Learning about Neurodiversity at School (LEANS) <https://salvesen-research.ed.ac.uk/leans>

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Accessibility website <https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/centre-for-accessibility/>