



Supporting doctors with disabilities and long-term conditions

Dr Hannah Barham-Brown is a GP trainee in Yorkshire and Humber and a disability activist, she is helping to promote the BMA's new survey of doctors who are disabled or have long-term health conditions.

When I developed a disability as a medical student, I found myself questioning whether my career was over before it had even begun. Graduating in a wheelchair, I didn't know other doctors with disabilities existed, making it so hard to find my way through a training programme which can seem horrendously complicated to even the most able of juniors.

Through my engagement with the BMA, I discovered that actually, there are many of us; but we are the oft-forgotten group. The damaging narrative of 'Superhuman' doctors seems to extend to our health; people are genuinely surprised we exist as a cohort at all, so it can feel like we are (quite literally, in some cases), reinventing the wheel with every job rotation.

Disabled doctors work just as hard as our colleagues; we just work differently. Patients tell us that our conditions can be an asset in our clinical practice; we have an added level of understanding, and an intimate knowledge of the systems our patients often have to navigate to receive care and support.

Yet we know that in the NHS, disabled staff are the group most likely to experience bullying and harassment. Despite my self-confident and forthright exterior, I have experienced these behaviours at the hands of my colleagues. On one occasion, I was pushed to tears by a surgeon I had never met asking "Should you even be in work?", as I rolled through the ED in my scrubs, getting on with my shift.

Some of us work Less Than Full Time, but that doesn't mean we aren't contributing to the NHS in different ways; I spend a lot of my non-clinical time travelling around trusts across the country, talking to them about how and why they can and should support disabled staff, and other those from other protected characteristics.

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is considered to be 'disabled' if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Under this definition, a lot of staff are likely to be considered 'disabled', and yet very few disclose this to employers.

We know that there are a variety of reasons why people, like me, choose General Practice. One of those may be the potential for portfolio work, supporting those of us who struggle to physically work clinically full time.

So how can you help this cohort of doctors? The BMA are carrying out a survey of disabled doctors and medical students to find out about their experiences in medical education, training and work, and their perceptions of the support they receive from their place of work, their place of study, and from the BMA. This will enable us to focus our efforts on tackling the issues that disabled doctors and medical students believe would make the greatest difference to their professional lives.

Please, if you are disabled or have a long-term condition, complete the survey, and if not, please share it with colleagues and friends. It could really help the medical students and doctors of the future.

The survey is online [here](#) and the BMA's resources for disabled doctors and medical students are [here](#).