

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Students with Physical Disabilities in Clinical Training Settings: Access & Accommodations



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Introduction

As of 2022, an estimated 13.4% of the 328 million respondents to the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey report having a disability. Of those between the ages of 18-64 years old, 12% identify having ambulatory difficulty. In the 30 years since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, barriers to nurses with physical disabilities persist. This project examines the clinical microsystems of a nursing student with physical accommodations with primary focus on clinical and experimental learning.

Methods

- A review of literature pertaining to nursing students requiring physical accommodation was conducted using key terms: "nursing," "nursing students," "physical accommodation," "physical disability," and "ADA." Literature was limited to peer reviewed, English language publications.
- IRB exemption obtained to speak with a nursing student with physical accommodations pertaining to her experience as a nursing student at a public university in New Hampshire.
- The University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office's Student Accessibility Services content pertaining to academic accommodations outside of the traditional classroom setting and more specific to clinical and experimental learning environments was reviewed.

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Results

Horkey (2019) examined faculty experiences in accommodation implementation among nursing students with orthopedic impairments:

- Collaboration
- Re-learning
- Out of the "box"
- Foster equality
- Trial & Error
- Changing Perception
- Planning Ahead

Calloway & Copeland (2021) explored acute care nurses' attitudes pertaining to precepting students with physical disabilities:

- Safety
- Barriers
 - Physical
 - Sensory
- Otherness
- Communicating to meet needs
- Disclosure
- Student vs. Colleague

IRB exempt conversation with a nursing student with an orthopedic impairment exploring the lived experience as a nursing student at public university in New Hampshire

- **Attitudes**
 - Defeatist
 - Uncertain
 - Unsupportive
- **Clinical Placement**
 - Single clinical site
 - Decreased equity
- **Barriers**
 - Social
 - Physical

Discussion

There is significant evidence that barriers in education and employment persist due to technical standards without reasonable accommodations within the nursing workforce. Continued research is needed across larger and diverse settings and populations to understand the barriers that exist between the nursing student, faculty, and clinical partners. Additional research is necessary to challenge the technical standards in the setting of the Americans with Disabilities Act within the nursing: education, clinical learning, and within the workforce. This knowledge can provide greater guidance pertaining to accommodations among those with disabilities in other clinical based fields across multiple levels.

Next Steps

Continued exploration of Nursing Students' Experiences

Provide potential answers to "How can I help you?"

Challenge the technical standards of clinical placements both locally and globally.

References





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Biography

Dr. Clarissa Michalak is an Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and the Director of the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Program at the University of New Hampshire. She graduated in 2007 from the University of Maine with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and High Honors from the University's Honors College. While at UMaine, she was a member of the Division I Women's Track and Field team and set two school records in weight and hammer throws and was the America East Conference Champion in 2006, 2007 (Hammer Throw).

Dr Michalak began her nursing career at Johns Hopkins in medical-surgical nursing and the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU). In 2012, she graduated from Towson University with a Master's in Nursing Education. She worked as a nurse in Washington, DC; Houston, TX; and New York City, NY before earning her post-master's certificate as an Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner from the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 2015. She started working as a member of the critical care medicine team at New York University Langone Medical Center in 2015. During her time at NYULMC, she earned her Doctorate in Nursing Practice (DNP) from NYU's Rory Meyer's School of Nursing.

In 2020, she began her career at the University of New Hampshire as the founding Director of the Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Program. Dr. Michalak also works as a per diem hospitalist at Maine Medical Center. Dr. Michalak aims to foster an inclusive learning environment for all students by recognizing each students' unique needs as she would in her patients. Clarissa aims to improve the quality of personalized health through the integration of genomics in clinical practice. She is an active advocate and volunteer with the National Psoriasis Foundation and the American Association of Critical Care Nurses.

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