

GP Tutor Workshop

How to support your Neurodivergent Medical Student on placement

Dr Kate Buchanan

May 2025

Introduction: About me

- GP 1 day a week
- Community Clinical Teacher at University of Liverpool
- GP doing Health Assessments on Looked After Children at Alder Hey
- Neurodivergent myself
- Diagnosed as autistic aged 24, with ADHD aged 31
- Recognise the challenges in training for both the students and the GP tutors

Plan

- 1 hour session
- Interactive
- 10 mins Q and A at the end

Spend some time in your small groups (10mins)

Consider what difficulties on placement a student with the following neurodivergent conditions may have:

- 1) Autism
- 2) ADHD
- 3) Dyslexia

What challenges have you found having a ND medical student?

Are there any benefits to having a ND medical student?

Feedback

Common Challenges

- Communication skills (patients and colleagues)
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Time management (consultations/writing up)
- Rapport and management as a GP tutor
 - Giving feedback
 - Team working
 - Engagement with portfolio

A Starting Point

- ND medical students are often remarkably resilient and have overcome many barriers
- A good positive experience of medical school can provide benefits moving forwards
- Advocating for yourself can be hard
- Can often feel like a big gap between students and tutors, which makes disclosing tricky

Why do you think ND students find communication
with patients and colleagues tricky?

(5-10 mins)

Feedback

Communication challenges

- body language is confusing!
- eye contact hurts
- sarcasm
- listening can be boring
- environmental noise
- patient's agenda
- clashing thoughts
- social expectation around socialising
- black and white thinking
- erratic train of thought
- being still
- joining in conversations
- listening
- processing time
- unexpected questions
- uncertainty
- exhaustion after
- being in a pair

Communication with patients

- Communication can be improved!
 - Exam communication: like a driving test
 - GP communication different to hospital, so students don't have as much experienced
 - Cultural differences
 - Students in pairs: challenges
-
- Structure: PRACTICE! Observe, let them observe you!
 - Help them develop a script

Reasonable Adjustments

- A reasonable adjustment is a change that must be made to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to a person's disability when doing their job
- Allows the person to perform their job to the best of their abilities.
- Legal duty to provide and consider reasonable adjustments.
- University should be able to support via student support plans
- Remember is it not discrimination to give a disabled employee 'advantages': rather it is removing the barriers and making it fairer

Sensory difficulties

- GP environment can be very noisy and visually overwhelming

Students may benefit from:

- Quiet space
 - Consistent room
-
- Encourage using time to defuse: go for lunch walks

Why do you think those who are ND can have time management difficulties?

Have you found any strategies for managing these?

(5-10mins)

Feedback

Time Management and ND in GP

- Students benefit from longer consultations than us!
- However challenges can come from:
 - Time perception: how long a task takes
 - Processing difficulties
 - Getting started!
 - Fixed schedules
 - Task overwhelm if needs multiple stages
- Pressure can make things slower

Time Management/Organisation

- Structure the day to play to strengths
- Timers
- Is the issue the consultation or the admin?
- Earlier start/later start/shorter lunch to allow for breaks
- Notebook for lists
- Routine

Rapport/communication between you

- Curiosity, not criticism ‘tell me about what led you to a diagnosis’ ‘how does this impact you every day’ ‘what do you think your strengths are?’
- Verbal/written
- Be aware of your own misconceptions
- Clear communication: ‘asking for a quick chat’ can be VERY anxiety provoking

Do you have any examples of good and not so good situations when you have given feedback to a ND student?
(5 mins)

Feedback

Feedback

- Knowing the student: more direct if autistic vs gentler more supportive if ADHD
 - Rejection sensitive dysphoria: extreme emotional sensitivity and pain triggered by the perception that they have been rejected/criticised by important people in their life.
 - May also be triggered by a sense of falling short: failing to meet their own high standards or others expectations.
- Location
- What time is best: morning/afternoon?
- Setting: when side by side/facing each other
- State the issue clearly, and help problem solve!
- Processing time

The exhaustion of being ND

- GP is exhausting (FACT) and being ND is exhausting
 - Please recognise the extra challenges and celebrate the achievements!
-
- Recognise the impact of short placements on students
 - Students working in pairs can be challenging for all

Final points

- Challenges for both GP tutors and student on placement
- It is ultimately possible to be a good doctor and ND
- Curiosity and compassion from day 1 sets the scene
- Small changes can make a big difference
- Clarity with communication and expectations
- Flexibility where able
- Celebrate the victories!

Resources

- FB groups (Autistic doctors international, Association of Neurodiverse Doctors, Doctors inclusive neurodivergent group)
- Practitioner Health
- Peer support where able
- Podcast:
 - You are not a frog 25/7/2023 'how to thrive in a high stress job as a ND person'
 - Divergent conversations podcast

Resources

- Websites:
 - Megan Neff <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/>
- Books:
 - Unmasked by Elle Middleton
 - Looking after your autistic self by Niamh Garvey
 - Unmasking Autism Devon Price
 - Strong Female Character Fern Brady
 - Unbroken Alexis Quinn
 - Different not less Chloe Hayden

Questions?

Kate.Buchanan@livgp.nhs.uk