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DISABILITY IN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

Low numbers of disabled doctors mean potential loss of insightful care for everyone

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The BMA report *Disability in the medical profession: survey findings 2020* highlights the fact that disabled doctors are not getting the workplace adjustments they need.¹ It also uncovers broader exclusion and discrimination in the medical profession in the UK.

The report states that “disabled doctors and medical students are a valuable part of our profession, bringing unique perspectives and insight into patient experiences and healthcare.”² It also highlights, however, the significant additional problems experienced by this group. One in three (35%) of the 705 doctors and medical students with disabilities surveyed reported being bullied or harassed in their current workplace because of their disability, reaching 42% among consultants. Overall, 77% of respondents said they were worried about being treated unfavourably if they disclosed a disability or long term health condition. Unsurprisingly, rates of disclosure of disability by staff and students are among the lowest for medicine and dentistry compared with other disciplines.^{3 4} Across the board, these variables are even worse for disabled doctors and medical students from ethnic minorities.

The Royal Society report *Disability STEM data for students and academic staff in higher education 2007-08 to 2018-19* showed that only 10.9% of entrants to medicine and dentistry had a known disability, lowest of all the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects (15.5%) and lower than for non-STEM subjects (16.4%).⁴ Among staff, only 5.3% of STEM academic staff working in subjects allied to medicine have a known disability, and staff and students with disability have a worse career trajectory than those without disabilities.

We are all missing out by these failings, as the talent pool of prospective doctors is reduced, and potential staff with arguably the most insight are excluded from providing care. We need to get serious about disability inclusion in the medical professions.

Competing interests: None declared.

¹ Rimmer A. Disabled doctors are not getting the workplace adjustments they need, research finds. *BMJ* 2020;370:m3189. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m3189 pmid: 32788158

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⁴ Careers research and advisory centre. Qualitative research on barriers to progression of disabled scientists. 2020. <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/topics/diversity-in-science/qualitative-research-on-barriers-to-progression-of-disabled-scientists.pdf>