



Understanding Ableism and Accommodations

DFM Faculty Development
February 2026

Objectives

Examine

Examine common biases and language that contributes to ableism

Recognize

Recognize the burden learners with disabilities experience in their medical training

Discuss

Discuss the barriers for both learners and preceptors in implementing accommodations

Explore

Explore inclusive strategies to support learners



We are on Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, Wolastogey, and Peskotomuhkati People.

We also acknowledge the deep roots and ongoing contributions of African Nova Scotian communities who have experienced enslavement, displacement, and systemic discrimination, yet continue to demonstrate strength and leadership.

DISCLOSURES

Dr. Thomson

- Research grant from Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Fatigue Risk Management)

Dr. MacLeod

- Research grants from Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Dr. Sutherland

- No disclosures

Luke (he/him) Med 3

- Creative, passionate
- Disorganized
- Difficulty task switching
- Performance not reflecting ability
- EPAs and Logs not up to date
- Embarrassed
- Overwhelmed
- Imposter Syndrome/Isolated

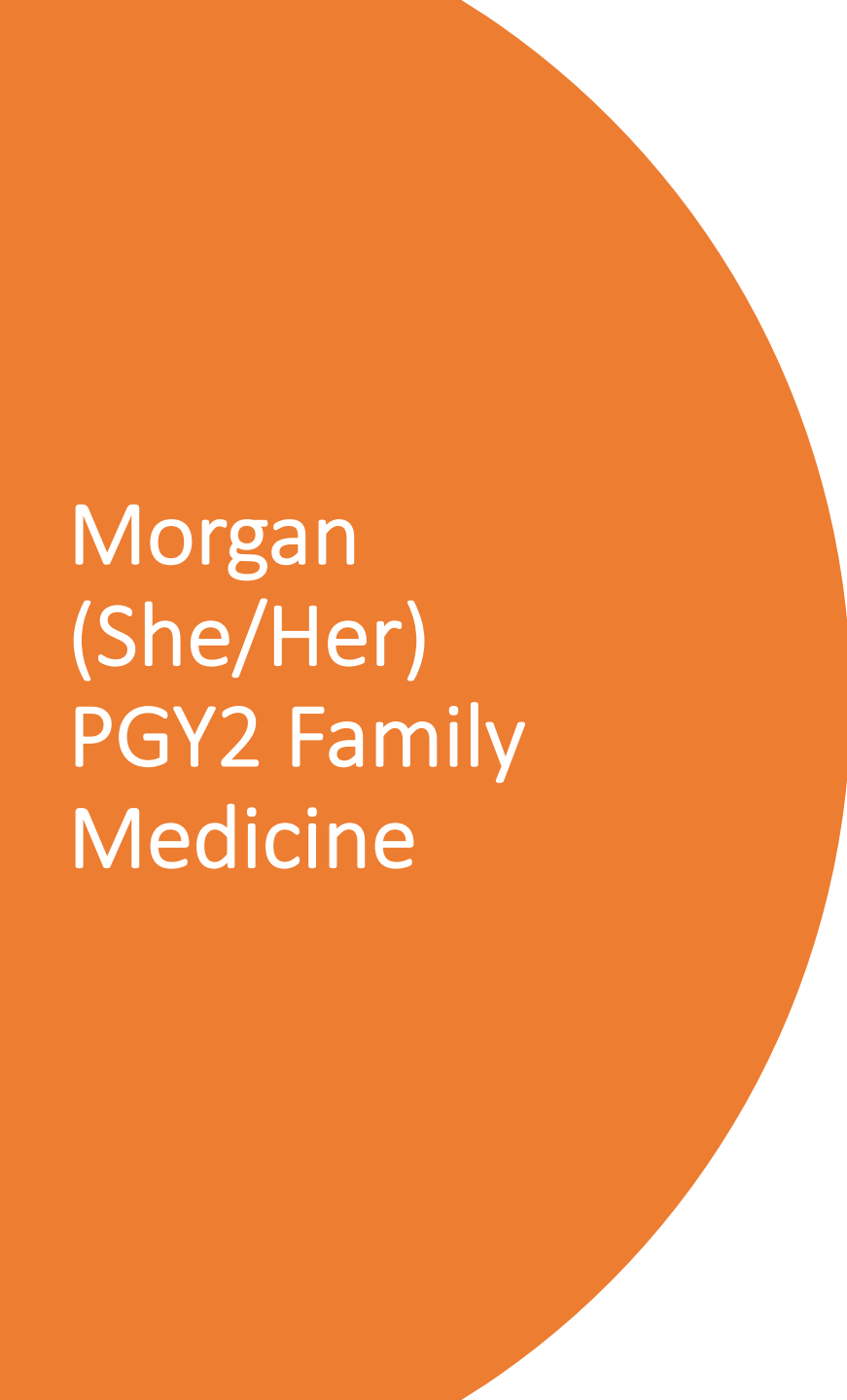


Adapted from: Johnson, J.-A., & Ahluwalia, S. (2024). Neurodiversity in the healthcare profession



Sanjay (he/him)
PGY1 FM

- MVA resulting in spinal cord injury/partial paralysis lower limbs
- Can walk with assistive devices
- Prolonged standing/exertion → severe pain and fatigue
- Seeking accommodations to continue medical training



Morgan
(She/Her)
PGY2 Family
Medicine

Partner is resident in Family Medicine

15 month-old child

Scheduled to do mandatory 8 week core rotation away from home site

No family locally to assist with childcare

Requesting not to go to away rotation due to family status

An aerial photograph of a well-maintained garden. A light-colored gravel path winds through a lush green lawn. The path is bordered by dark grey edging stones. There are several circular garden beds, each containing a small, rounded green shrub. The overall scene is peaceful and orderly.

Groundwork: definitions and fundamentals-

Disability

Ableism

Accommodation

Universal Design



World Health Organization

Disability is an umbrella term that links variability in body/mind function or structure with an activity limitation or a participation restriction in an individual's social and/or physical environment

Ableism

- “...the production, and reproduction of social/cultural/economic/political beliefs, practices and norms that devalue and oppress those perceived not to meet these norms.”¹

- Importance of language

[Redefining ableism in health care: Dal learners receive Curriculum Innovation Award for new resource - Dal News - Dalhousie University](#)

<https://www.docswithdisabilities.org/>



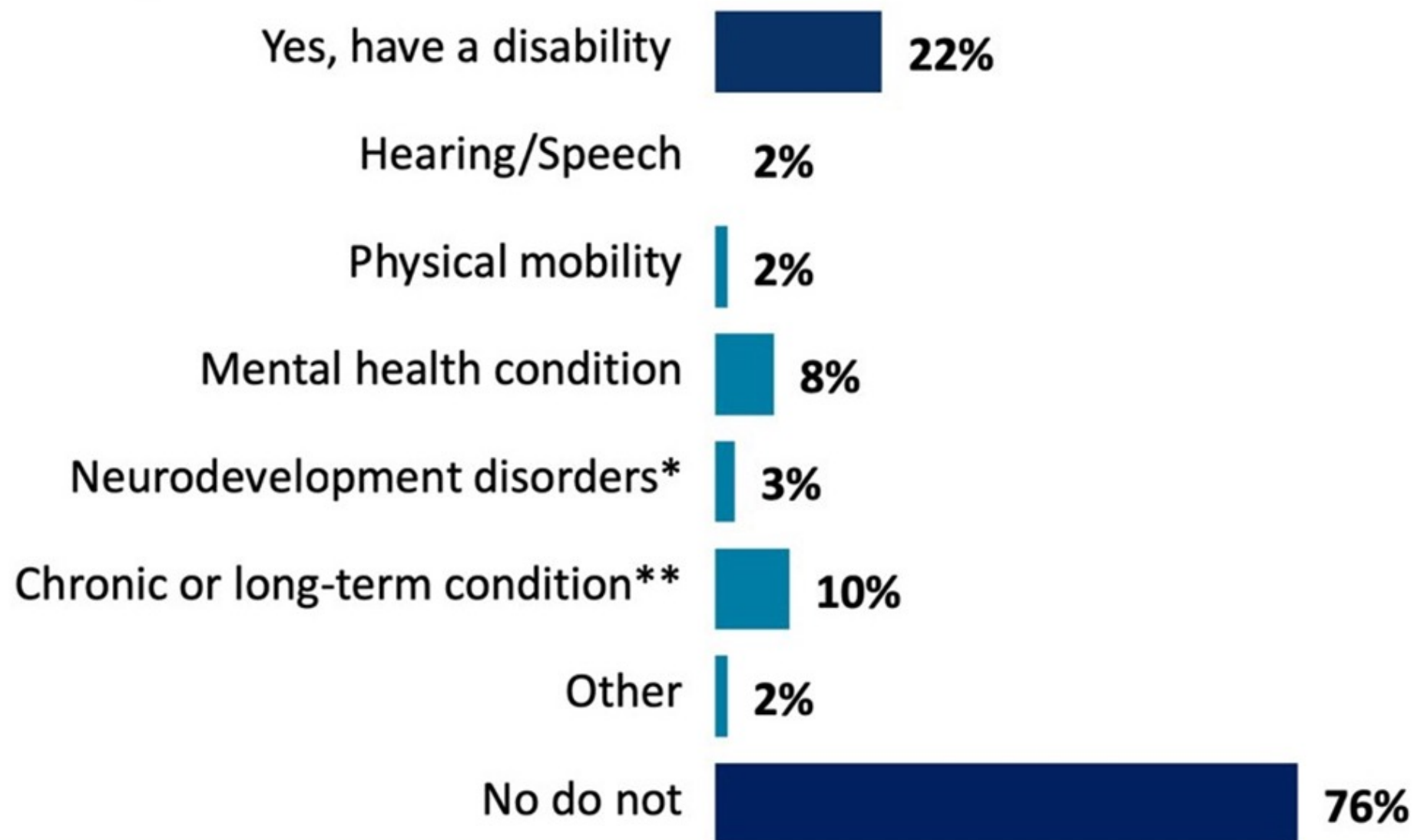
ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT



VISION

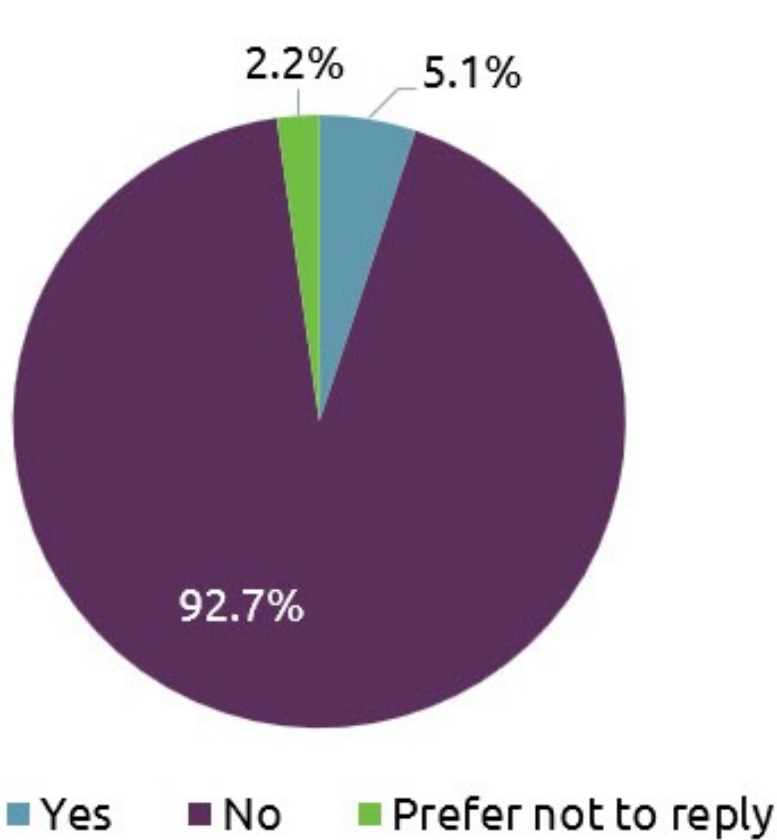
**PROACTIVELY ELIMINATE BARRIERS
AND ENSURE GREATER OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CANADIANS WITH DISABILITIES.**

LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

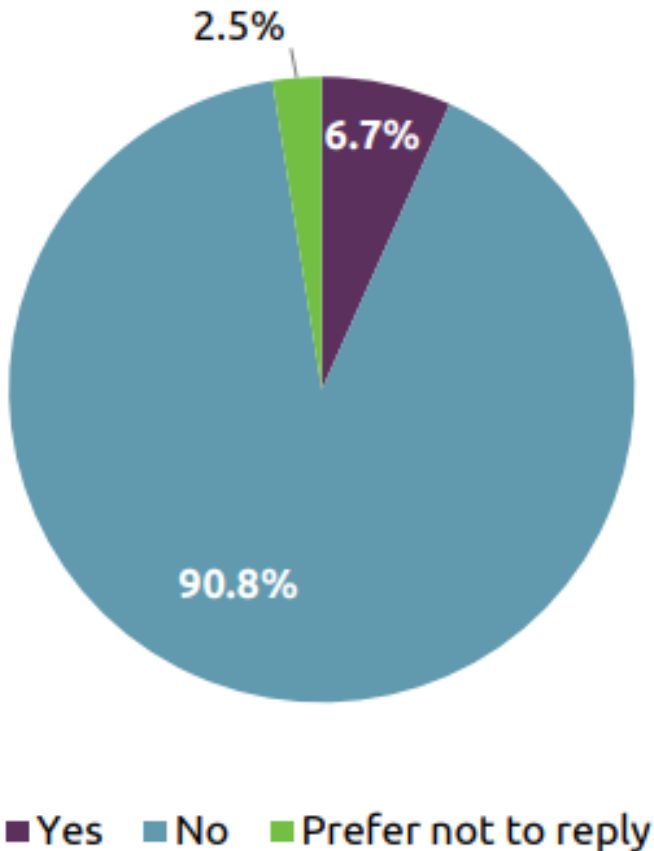


CMA 2021

Do you consider yourself a person with a visible or invisible disability?



2023



2024

Core Competencies and Functional Abilities UGME:

***with or without
accommodation***

Learning and Assessment of Learning

Communication

Knowledge Integration

Patient Safety

Professionalism

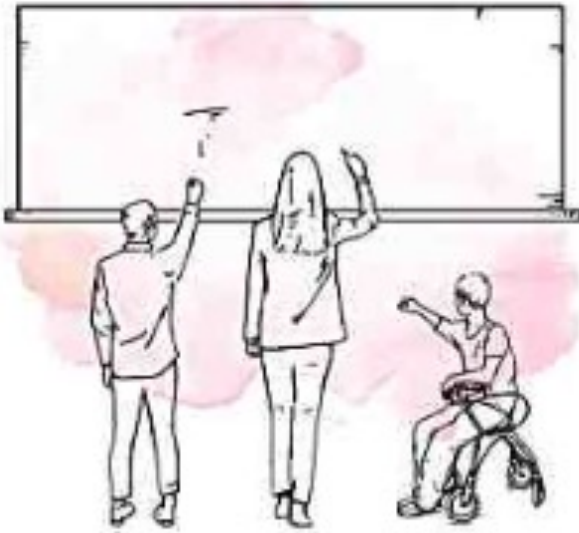
Essential Skills & Abilities Required for Postgraduate Medical Education

Office of Accountability:	Postgraduate Medical Education
Office of Administrative Responsibility:	Postgraduate Medical Education
Scope:	All Postgraduate Trainees; All non-Dalhousie Trainees registered for electives; and University and Postgraduate Training Program Leadership
Approved:	PGME Committee – 4-Nov-2021 Faculty Council – 1-Feb-2022

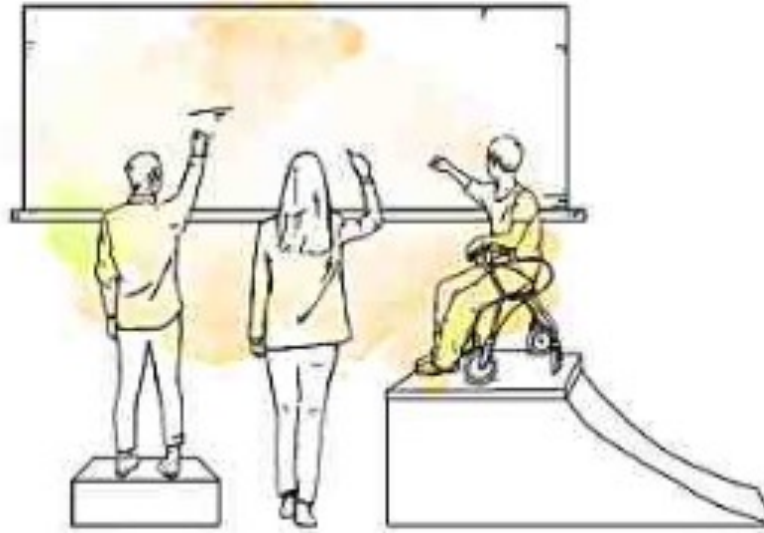
“Technological compensation can be made for some handicaps in certain of these areas, but a candidate should be able to perform in a reasonably independent manner.”

<https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/faculty/medicine/departments/core-units/postgrad/Essential Skills and Abilities 3.pdf>

Equality



Accommodation



Accessibility



Accommodation

Pereira-Lima K, Meeks L et. al. JAMA 2023

- **11.9% PGY1s in US have at least 1 type of disability**
- **48% needed accommodations but > half did not request them**

Why?

- **Stigma or bias**
- **Lack of clear process**
- **Residents are uniquely vulnerable**



Dual Role for Residents & Clerks

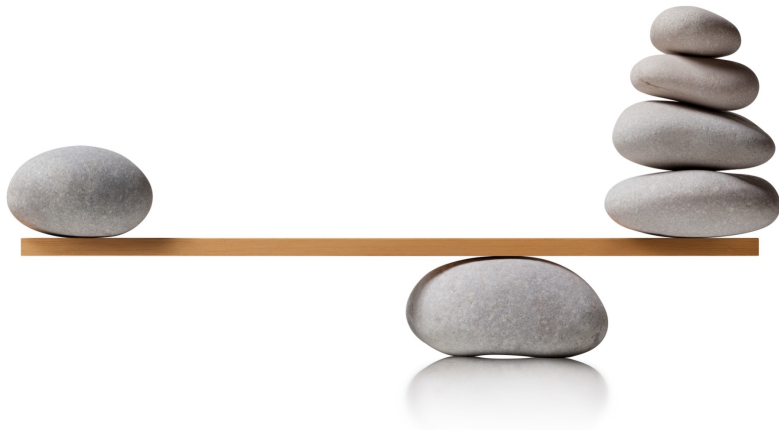
Accommodations must be developed based on the functional limitations of the trainee and their disability in both the workplace AND academic environments

WORKPLACE



ACADEMIC

Duty to accommodate



Undue Hardship

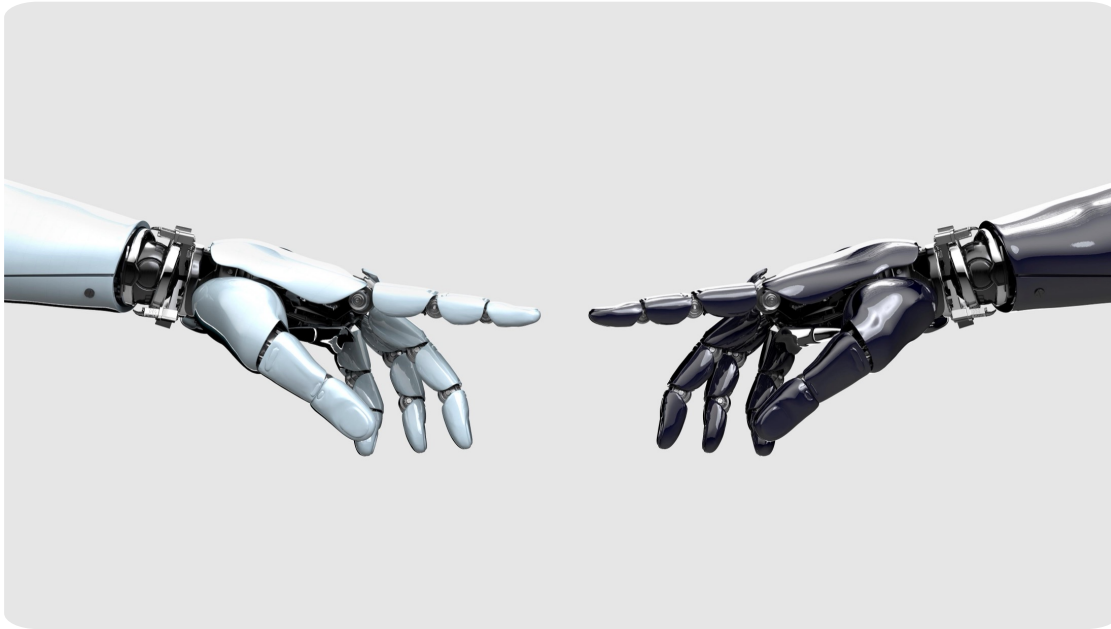


Universal Design for Learning

[Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) -
Digital Accessibility Toolkit \(canada.ca\)](#)

[AWWW \(EN\) - 20231127 - Clean \(canada.ca\)](#)

Academic Accommodations



Assessment



Classroom/Tutorial



Academic/workplace

Undergraduate Accommodations

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25* (*clerkship placement)	2025/Feb 1/26* (*clerkship placement)
Total Accom plans	38	61	85	85
Total Students	536	558	587	628
% Accom	7%	11%	14.4%	13.5%

Collaboration:

- Student
- Student Accessibility Center (SAC)
- UGME
- Student Affairs
- Teachers/Preceptors/RHA

[Student Accommodations Manual](#)

[Accessibility - Academic Support - Dalhousie University](#)

Resident Accommodation 2020-2025

2024-2025: 21 learners

2023-2024: 23 learners

2022-2023: 15 learners

2021-2022: 13 learners

2020-2021: 4 learners

Accommodations

Academic Support

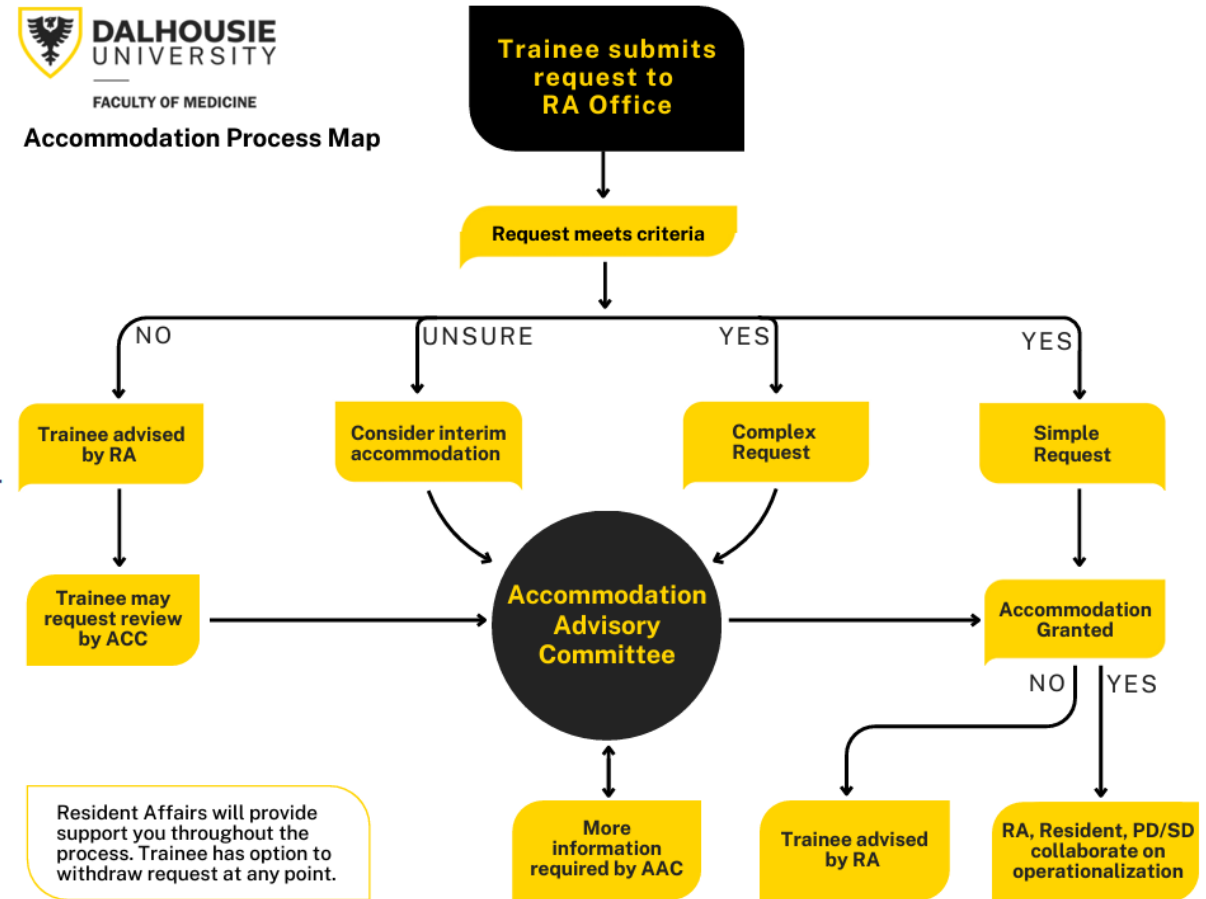
Resources:

1. [Accommodations FAQs](#)
2. [PGME Accommodations Policy](#)
3. [Request for Accommodations Form](#)
4. [PGME Accommodation Process Map](#)
5. [Health Information Request](#)

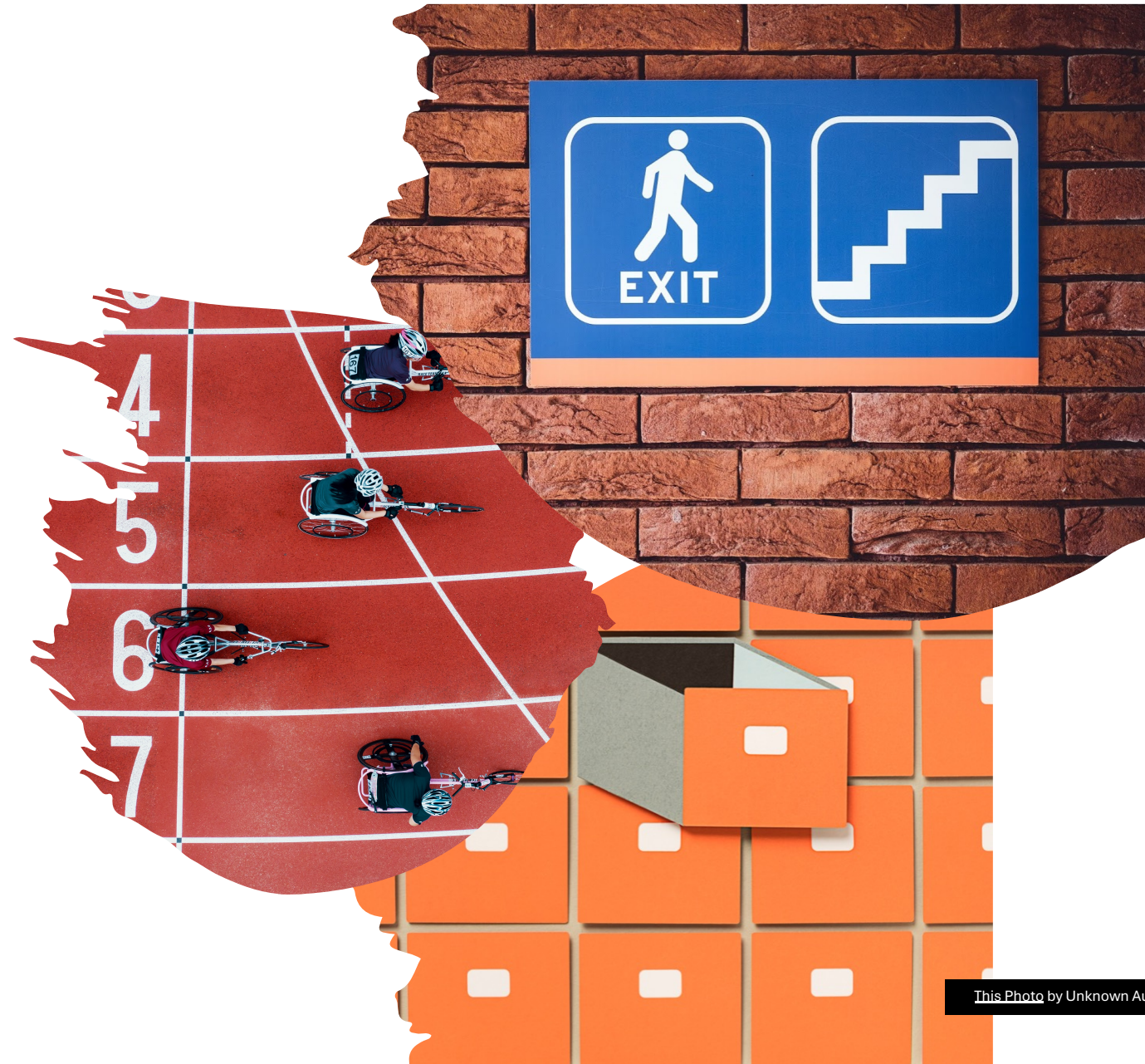
Please [contact us directly](#) to request an accommodation form or if you any questions.



Accommodation Process Map



UGME to PGME to Future Employment Paradigm Shifts



This Photo by Unknown Authr is licensed under [CC-BY-NC-ND](#)



Athletes pose for a photo at the reveal of Lululemon Athletica's Canada outfits for the opening, closing and medal ceremonies
Photograph: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

Team Approach:

Learner

SAC/OT/Expert care provider

UGME/PGME

Asst Deans/Directors

Clerkship Directors

Program & Site directors

Coordinators

Program Administrators,

Preceptors, tutors

Student & Resident Affairs

Black/Indigenous Health

Human Rights & Equity

Legal

RHAs

Faculty Development/CPDME

Common Challenges in Navigating Accommodations with Residents

ISSUE

NARRATIVE

Overtaxed system and supervisors

“We don’t have the time or resources”

Skepticism about accommodation process

“Why is this accommodation needed?”

Program and specialty culture

“We don’t do that here”; “It’s never been done”

Lack of flexibility within program

“This is the only way it can be done”

Tension among peers

“That isn’t fair”; “That means more work for me”

Common Challenges in Navigating Accommodations with Residents

ISSUE

NARRATIVE

Culture of medicine

“They just won’t cut it”; “We’ve got to prepare them for the real world”; I’ve had to figure out how I work with my health issue on my own”

Invisible vs visible disability

“Is this a real disability?”; “How do we know they are not making it up?”

Trainee with academic challenges AND has a disability

“Maybe they’re not cut out for this specialty”

Examples of Accommodations

- Extra time/distraction reduced space for exams admin work
- Part time training (residency)
- Duty hours/ on call modifications
- Adjustments to physical environment
- Changes to placement/rotation sites based on family status
- Access to technology/AI
- Use of intermediary/assistant



Neurodiversity in medical education

Definition: “diversity in thinking, learning, and processing the world around us” Singer, 1999

Includes ASD, ADHD and learning disorders

15-20% of world’s population exhibit ND

Co-morbidities

Strengths

Challenges

Resources:

[CADDRA | The Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance](#)

[Autistic Doctors International](#)

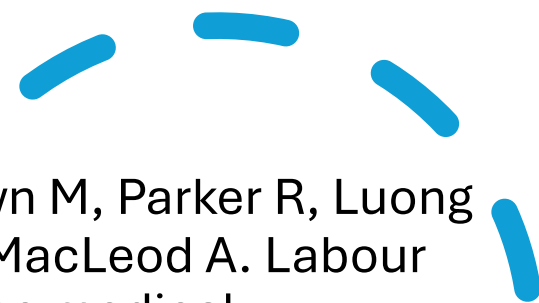


Cases



From the literature

- Invisible Work



- Cameron P, Fletcher J, Brown M, Parker R, Luong V, Kits O, Burm S, Ajjawi R, MacLeod A. Labour upon labour: A best evidence medical education (BEME) meta-ethnography of underrepresented students' experiences of medical school. Med Teach. 2025 Aug 13:1-16. doi: 10.1080/0142159X.2025.2540413. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 40802180.

- Working 10 times harder
- Embodying the ideal
- Invisibility and hype-visibility
- Survival strategies

Luke Med 3

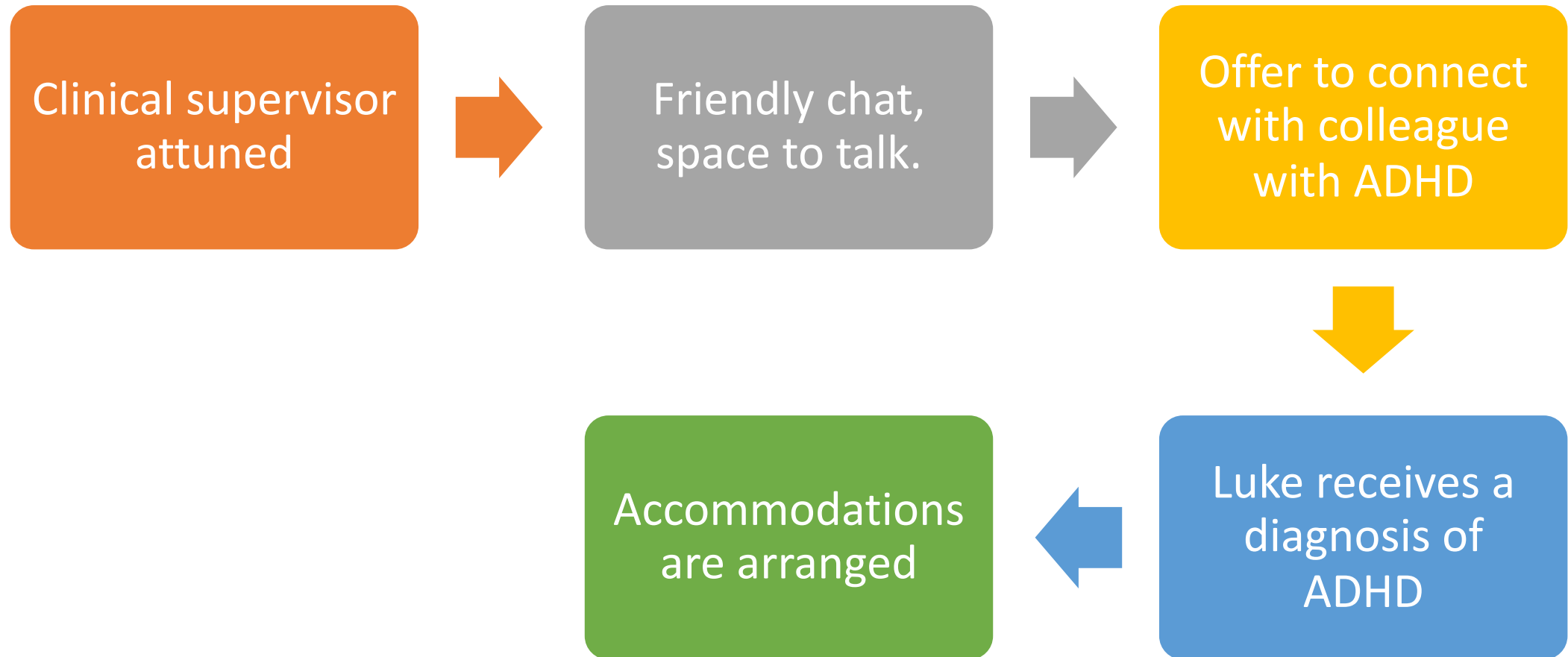
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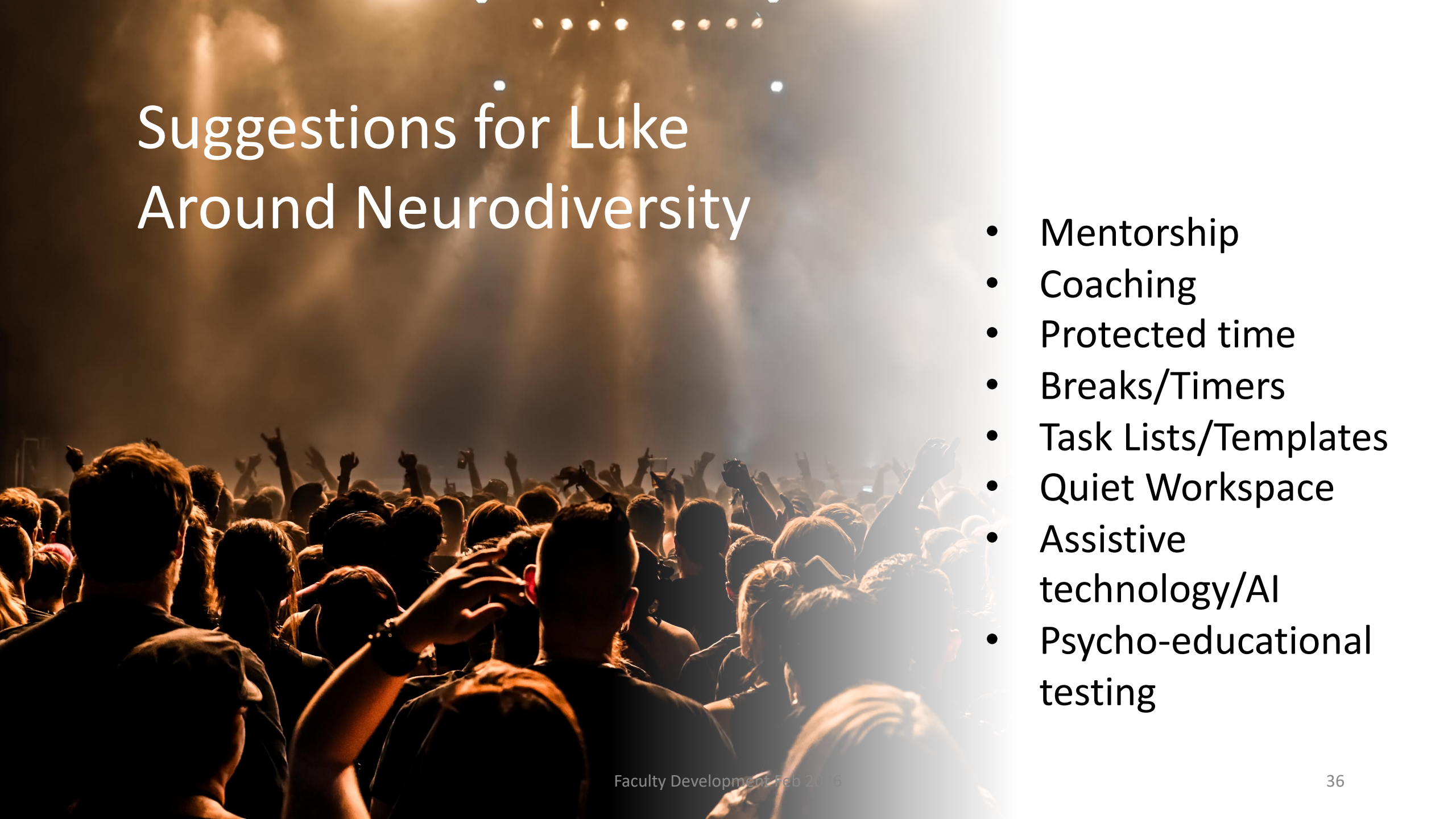


[Graphic Medicine | The Shame Space | Advancing Awareness of Shame in Medicine](#)

Adapted from: Johnson, J.-A., & Ahluwalia, S. (2024). Neurodiversity in the healthcare profession

What if: Luke Med 3...





Suggestions for Luke Around Neurodiversity

- Mentorship
- Coaching
- Protected time
- Breaks/Timers
- Task Lists/Templates
- Quiet Workspace
- Assistive technology/AI
- Psycho-educational testing

Neurodiversity: Suggestions for Faculty

- Be kind
- Be curious
- Be clear about expectations
- Clear feedback/documentation





Sanjay, PGY1 FM

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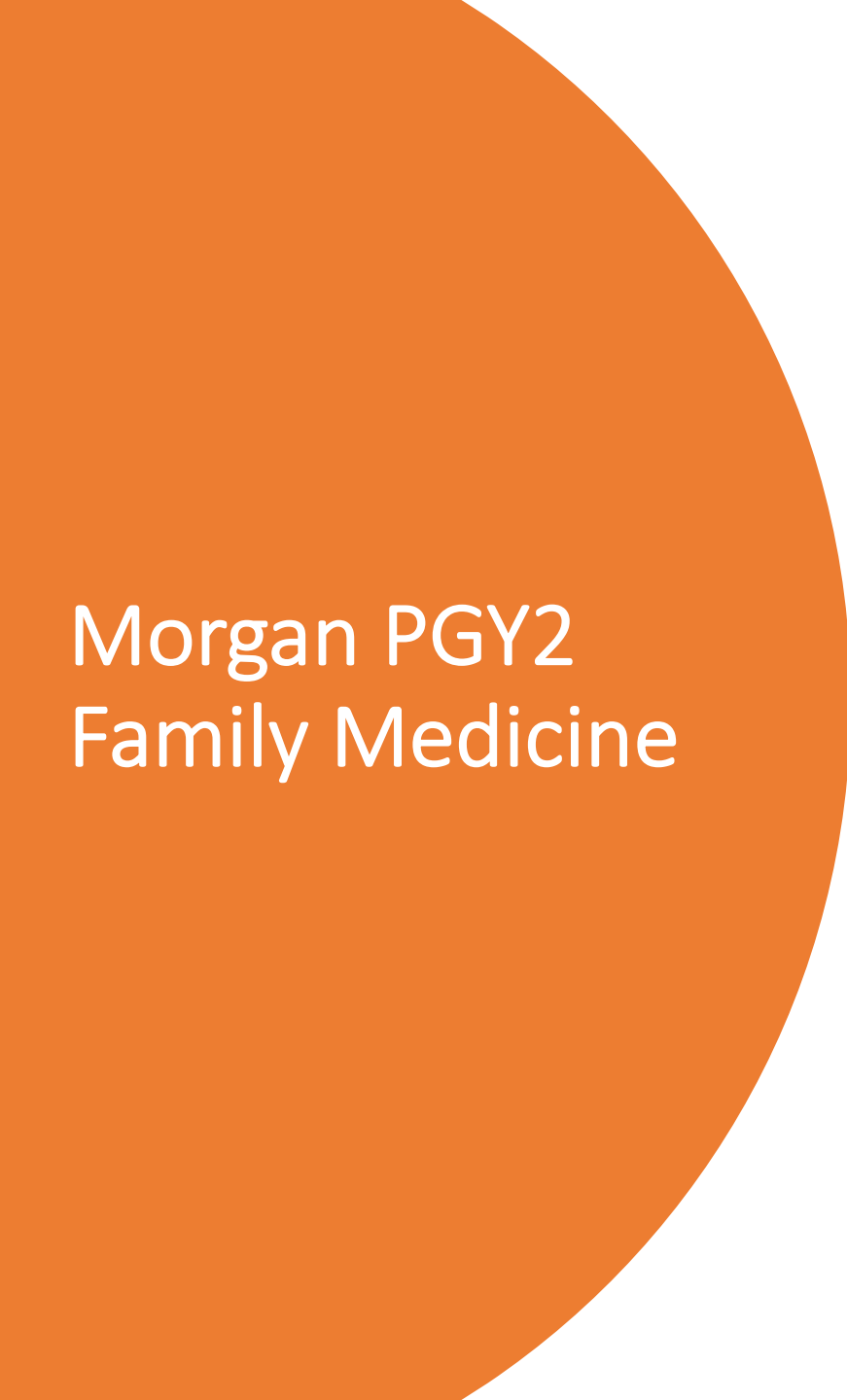
Challenges?

1. Long Shifts & Standing Requirements
2. Hospital Infrastructure
3. Stigma & Bias
4. Call/Patient safety?

Accommodations for Sanjay

1. Modified Rounding Schedule
2. Assistive Technology & Equipment
3. Flexible Scheduling
4. Accessibility Modifications
5. Buddy call, call room location, team roles



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Morgan PGY2 Family Medicine

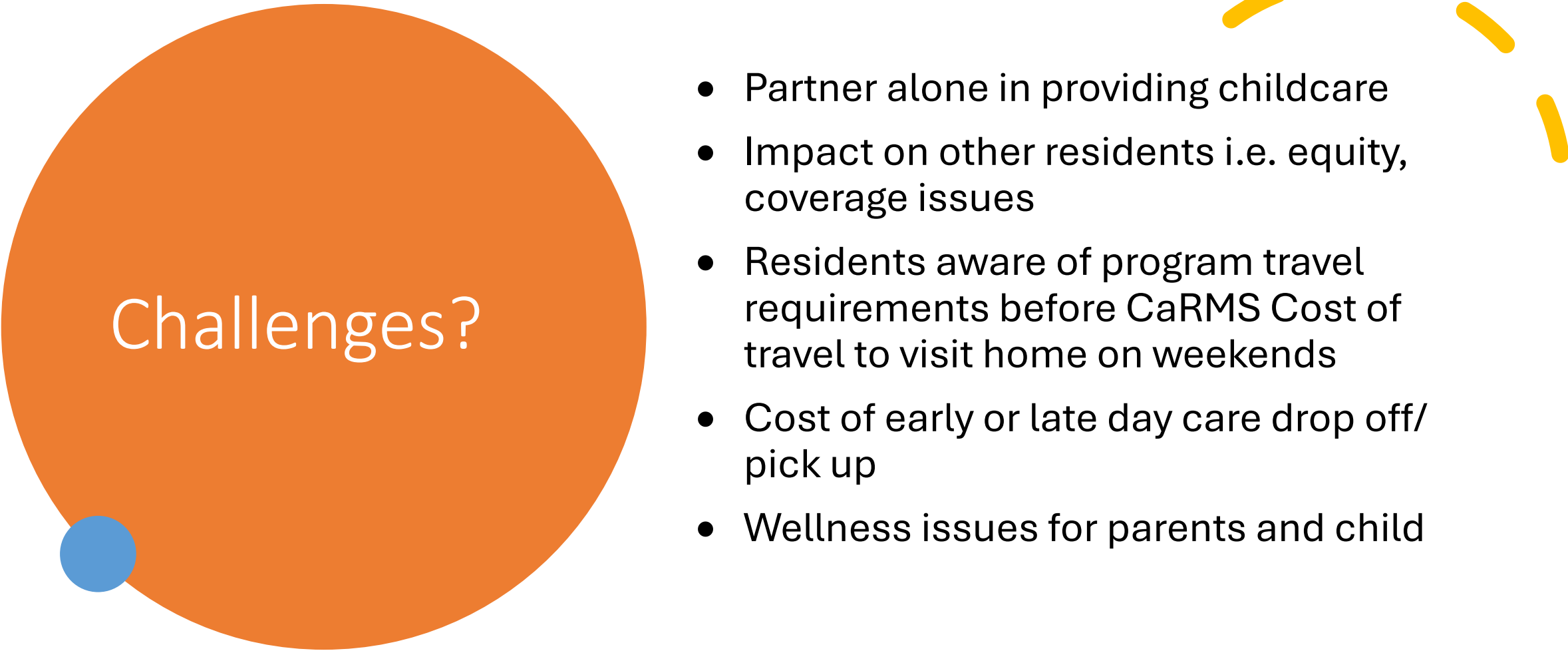
Partner is resident in Family Medicine

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No family locally to assist with childcare

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Challenges?

- Partner alone in providing childcare
- Impact on other residents i.e. equity, coverage issues
- Residents aware of program travel requirements before CaRMS Cost of travel to visit home on weekends
- Cost of early or late day care drop off/pick up
- Wellness issues for parents and child

Accommodations for Morgan

- Delaying rotation if necessary, i.e. breastfeeding
- Splitting rotation and schedule vacation during blocks
- Equivalent experience within commuting distance
- Accommodation for partner
- Support from family



Take aways

- Culture of respect & privacy
- Listen: learner is the expert
- Health is fluid
- Consider the why and the how
- Collaboration is crucial
- Be flexible
- Review, reconsider, adapt
- Complex financial considerations

Resources

- [Accessibility - Academic Support - Dalhousie University](#)
- [Student Affairs Office - Dalhousie University](#)
- [Student Accommodations Manual](#)
- [Academic Support - Resident Affairs - Dalhousie University](#)
- Canadian Association of Physicians with Disabilities: [Home | CAPD](#)
- Docs with Disabilities: <http://www.docswithdisabilities.org/>
- Disability Resource Hub: https://bit.ly/DisabilityResourceHUB_GME
- Clinical Accommodations Guide: [Clinical Accommodations Guide](#)
- Autistic Doctors International: [Autistic Doctors International](#)
- [CADDRA | The Canadian ADHD Resource Alliance](#)