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Guidance on Supporting Trainees with a Disability

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Introduction

This guidance is intended to provide direction and support to those involved in training who are addressing issues relating to trainees with a disability.

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, as the professional body for Surgery in Ireland believes that people with a disability should be welcomed into the profession and valued for their contribution to patient care.

Surgeons are no different to other professional groups and can experience ill health or disability at any point during their careers.

What is a disability?

The Employment Equality Acts, 1998 – 2015 define disability as:

- The total or partial absence of a person's bodily or mental functions
- Chronic disease or illness
- The malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body;
- A condition that results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition
- A condition that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgments, or which results in disturbed behaviour

The employment law in Ireland also covers people who have long-term disabling conditions, which may get worse over time, as well as people who used to have a disability but do not have it any more.

A disability that previously existed but no longer exists, or which may exist in the future or which is attributed to a person, will also be covered under this guidance.

While some disabilities are obvious (e.g. as in the case of wheelchair users), others are not readily apparent (e.g. dyslexia, epilepsy or a mental health issue).

The same disability can vary in its severity and affect people very differently so that while some people with disabilities may require personal assistance and/or equipment to realise their full potential, most can be fully effective without specialist help and so every person with disabilities will be supported as an individual.

Disability in training

There will be times when a trainee has a particular health condition or disability that may impact their progression pathway in training for a period of time.

Trainers and Educators can support trainees who find themselves in this situation and examine ways in conjunction with employers where reasonable support measures or adjustments can be introduced that would support a trainee.

Recruitment

Applicants with disabilities must be considered alongside all other applicants for training programmes. Any such applicants will be treated in line with the laws on employment and equal opportunities.

Retention

As the post graduate body responsible for surgical training in Ireland the RCSI will work closely with employers on reasonable adjustments to support doctors with a disability in training.

Postgraduate Deans and Training Programme Directors (TPDs) are encouraged to tailor individual training programmes to help trainees with disabilities to meet the requirements for satisfactory completion of training. The outcomes set out in the relevant curriculum should be assessed to the same standard but reasonable adjustments may need to be made to the method of education, training, assessment and duration of time to complete the programme of training.

Employers must make reasonable adjustments if disabled appointees require these. The need to do so should not be a reason for not offering an otherwise suitable placement. They should also take into account the assessments of progress and individual appointee's educational needs wherever possible.

Any trainee with a disability will need to have a tailored support and training plan in place based on their disability and surgical specialty as no trainees needs will be the same.

Supporting a trainee with a disability

Support should be tailored in line with the identified disability as outlined above. It is also recognised that a trainee may have external support systems in place but there should parallel supports within the programme to ensure the trainee has an advocate and mechanism to voice or outline any concerns they may have with regards to their training, this can be via an

- Training Programme Director
- Appointed support mentor
- Assigned Educational supervisor
- Via Trainee associations representative
- RCSI designed personal

Whilst all efforts should be made to support and ensure the dignity of all trainees within the workforce all specialties have a duty of care to the patient.

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to "step down" a trainee at risk who can longer provide or undertake patient care in a safe manner.

Where this arises the following pathway of support could be implemented

- Assess the trainees disability from a safety perspective for themselves and their patients
- Contact and liaise with Occupational health
- Offer counselling and support from the training body and make adjustments if appropriate
- Offer LTFT , career breaks or exceptional leave if appropriate .

Grievances

Any Trainee who has a concern that their training is been unfairly impacted by their disability or reasonable adjustments to their training plan and access to hospital sites is not available to them in line with the guidance should raise this , in the first instance , with their Training programme director, where a trainee is uncomfortable about approaching their Training programme director they should discuss the matter with the Director of National Training Programmes

Timeline /framework

All disability supports should be continually assessed throughout the training programme, a guided timeframe or check in review every 3 months with normal ARCP in December and May each year.

Identified issues or changes in supports should be worked through with the TPD and employers to ensure that any arrangements or solutions agreed upon can be implemented in a meaningful way.

Reference document

The following guidance document is also available to RCSI and Training Programme Directors as a guide to supporting trainees

- Guidance on returning to work from illness (**JCST**)
- Learning Disability guidance (**RCSEng exams**)
- Reasonable adjustments policy exams (**JCIE**)

Notes

All trainees at whatever stage of training, whether they have a long-term health condition or a disability, need to meet the competences and completion of MRCS or FRCS examinations as outlined by the ISCP curriculum and in order to obtain either CST – Certificate **or** Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training (CCST).