Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine

CQI CHRONICLE

Issue #26 | December 2025

How does misunderstanding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the stigma surrounding disabilities impact medical students at HMSOM?

Grace Bandoh, PhD & Daniel Chen, MA/MS

Some students are unaware that they may have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and entitled to academic accommodations but don't seek out accommodations due to the belief that they are not entitled to them.

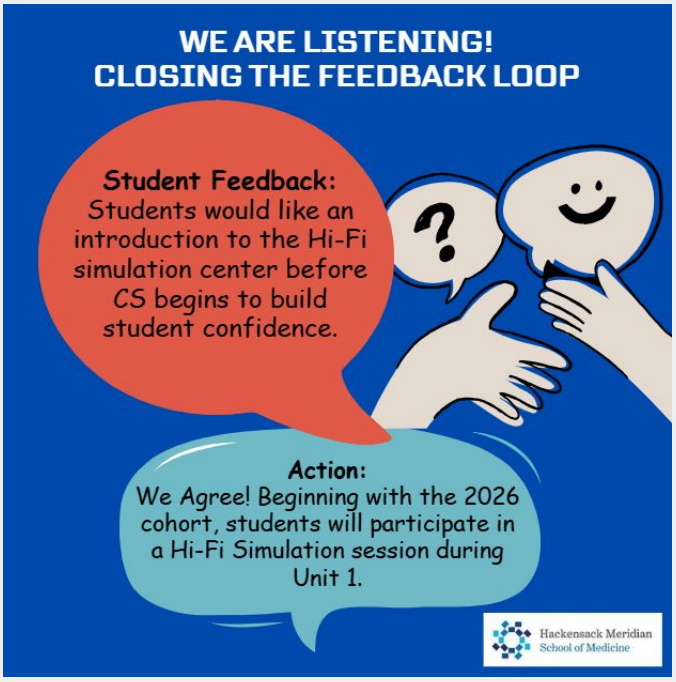
There is also stigma and fear involved with disability disclosure in society and medical schools in particular.

One study has shown a disparity between the number of people with disabilities in the U.S. vs U.S. doctors who identified as having a disability (Marzolf et al, 2022).

Another study shows a disparity between the number of medical students who self-identified as having a disability vs the number of medical students who formally notified their schools of their disabilities and their need for accommodations (Meeks et al, 2021).

(continued on page 2)

As part of our commitment to closing the feedback loop, the Office of Medical Education continuously reviews student feedback from evaluations, student panels, and other channels. In response, we have launched a **We Are Listening! Closing the Feedback Loop** series where we will highlight examples of student feedback along with the actions OME has taken. These updates reflect our continued effort to listen to student needs, strengthen trust and make meaningful improvements to the learning experience.



CQI CHRONICLE

Issue 26| December 2025

How does misunderstanding the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the stigma surrounding disabilities impact medical students at HMSOM? (continued)

This stigma has impacts on students. One is that medical students with disabilities often do not seek help because of the fear of being "outed" or ostracized within the medical education system (Nash et al, 2022).

This causes students to struggle without the accommodations and support they need to succeed causing these students to fail or drop out of medical school at a higher rate than their non-disabled peers.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control, over 28% of US adults identify as having some sort of disability (CDC, 2025, April 8) and doctors with disabilities will be better able to empathize and connect with those with disabilities.

Medical Schools need to mitigate the stigma surrounding disabilities and be more welcoming and supportive of medical students with disabilities so that they can become doctors with disabilities.

How Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at HMSOM Supports Students with Disabilities.

SAS continually strives to improve and tweaks policies and procedures to protect the anonymity of students with disabilities. An example is the recent change to remove student names and using student ID's on accommodation letters.

While accommodations are generally straightforward and easily applied to classes, some accommodations may contain nuances that may make it more difficult to implement. In such cases, we work with relevant stakeholders (students, faculty, HMSOM leadership) to determine what reasonable accommodations can be implemented and work to manage student expectations.

We meet with students during regular events such as HDIO, Resource Fairs, Drop In hours and individual meetings to offer support, strategize learning and mitigating disability related barriers to learning, explain and review accommodations.

(continued)

Our Objectives:

New students requesting accommodations will understand the process of obtaining accommodations for coursework and clinical environments.

We will also provide new students requesting information with a clear understanding of the processes for requesting reasonable accommodations.

All students contacting SAS will receive a response within 72 hours.

In the SAW Satisfaction survey, we are striving for 60% (or more) of SAS registered students endorsing/strongly agree to the questions posed in the SAS portion of the SAW Satisfaction Survey.

We are committed to continually review and adjust our processes to better support our students.

In conclusion:

With support from HMSOM and SAS, medical students with disabilities may become doctors with disabilities and that will be good for the significant population that have disabilities or will become disabled.

References:

Marzolf, B. A., McKee, M. M., Okanlami, O. O., & Zazove, P. (2022). Call to Action: Eliminate Barriers Faced by Medical Students With Disabilities. *The Annals of Family Medicine*, *20*(4), 376–378. https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2824

Meeks, L. M., Case, B., Herzer, K., Plegue, M., & Swenor, B. K. (2019). Change in Prevalence of Disabilities and Accommodation Practices Among US Medical Schools, 2016 vs 2019. *JAMA*, *322*(20), 2022. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.15372

Nash, R., Conner, B., Fellows, K., Clemmensen, B., Gullickson, R., & Goldrup, S. (2022). Barriers in medical education: a scoping review of common themes for medical students with disabilities. *Discover Education*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-022-00003-0

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, April 8). *Disability and Health Data now*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/articles-documents/disability-and-health-data-now.html

Please contact Marycarmen Kunicki at marycarmen.kunicki@hmsom.edu for additional information on topics included in this newsletter and if you would like to share the findings of any quality improvement projects with us for future publications.