STUDENT SUPPORT, HEALTH & WELLBEING

Dyslexia:

Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Practice Placement Support

Guidance for Practice Educators and Students

Canterbury Christ Church University

STUDENT SUPPORT, HEALTH & WELLBEING

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What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a combination of abilities and difficulties that can affect reading, writing and spelling as well as organisation, memory and sequencing. Importantly, it is not linked to intelligence, but to a need for structure, example-based explanations and reinforcement.

Under the terms of The Equality Act 2010, dyslexia is a recognised disability and dyslexic health professionals are therefore entitled to receive 'reasonable adjustments' or support. However, they still have to demonstrate that they are fit to practise and meet all the learning competencies and skills in the same way as others.

Students devise many 'coping strategies' to help with any difficulties their dyslexia may cause them in the academic setting. Some of these strategies may translate well into the practice placement, but others may be inappropriate in the workplace.

Dyslexia affects students in different ways and strategies that might have worked for one student on a practice placement may not be helpful for another.

People with dyslexia are often 'quick forgetters' rather than 'slow learners'. When faced with a task requiring new learning, they may have more difficulty than others, despite a similar level of ability. The level and quality of work might vary from day to day. Initially, students with dyslexia may need instructions repeated several times in order to learn different procedures and tasks.

The emotional impact of dyslexia in the workplace

Dyslexia can sometimes have a negative emotional impact on students in the workplace. Some students with dyslexia are under emotional stress as they are struggling to conceal their difficulties because of a fear of discrimination. They may find the workplace more tiring than others because of the extreme mental effort that is required.

Many with dyslexia struggle to come to terms with low self-esteem. They may lack confidence in their abilities, which could affect their performance in the practice placement. This is particularly the case if they have only recently been assessed as dyslexic. They may feel isolated and think that other students are learning procedures and tasks far more quickly than they are.

Dyslexia as a strength

People with dyslexia are considered to have a different way of thinking and learning. They often have key strengths: an ability to think holistically and to see the 'big picture'; good problem solving skills; creativity and imagination; good visualisation skills and spatial ability; and intuitive people skills. These skills can make dyslexics highly valuable team members.

Alongside these strengths lie challenges. However, through discussion, solutions can usually be found that are helpful to both students and the staff working with them. Students are often aware of their strengths and potential challenges and are able to outline their needs to those working with them.

This document sets out some of the challenges that might occur on placement and suggests some strategies that can be adopted by mentors/ supervisors and students working together to ensure that 'reasonable adjustments' are in place. It is not intended to replace Placement Learning Support Plans, drawn up between the student and their placement supervisor, when appropriate, but rather enhance the process. Moreover, it is very unlikely that students will experience all the difficulties outlined here and it is quite likely that many of the strategies are already part of general good practice within the workplace.

Remember – often, strategies helpful for professionals with dyslexia are helpful for everyone.

Memory difficulties, organisation and time management

Students may take longer to 'fix' information into their long-term memory and may require information presented more than once. They can appear to have a short attention span and be easily distracted in meetings. Dyslexics often find it more difficult to discard irrelevant or redundant information, which could lead to 'memory overload' and confusion.

Some people with dyslexia will experience difficulty with:

- following instructions
- ordering ideas
- remembering names and job titles
- remembering drug names and medical conditions
- recalling procedures, instructions or observations
- retaining information that is given verbally
- filing and sourcing information
- alphabetically or sequentially reading dates and times
- remembering phone messages accurately
- remembering information to pass to colleagues
- sequencing tasks correctly

Students may have difficulty with:

- balancing coursework and placement commitments
- planning work schedules/timetables
- estimating how much time is needed for a specific task
- allocating a realistic timeframe to different placement tasks
- completing tasks on time
- reacting quickly in busy environments
- learning routines/procedures quickly
- understanding exactly what is expected of them
- multitasking
- retaining information that is given during handover

> Memory difficulties, organisation and time management

Strategies for Practice Educators:

Students need structure and time to effectively transfer information from their short-term to long-term memories

- Together with the student, draw up a plan for the placement at the beginning, highlighting important information and dates.
- Set clear, measurable learning outcomes, using Student Agreements where appropriate.
- Be patient. Provide additional time in structured supervisory sessions to go through administrative procedures and routines for placement. Be prepared to explain tasks more than once at the beginning, but take care to avoid being condescending: remember, being dyslexic does not equate to lower intelligence.
- Give lots of opportunities for observations of qualified staff with patients/clients/service users in the first few days. Demonstrate and explain procedures simply. Ask the student to repeat/outline what s/he is going to do. Encourage reflection.
- Do not give too many instructions at once, particularly if the instructions are only given verbally.
- Give instructions in both written and verbal form whenever possible.
- If a task involves following a sequence, this could be set out clearly on a wall chart, manual or instruction sheet.
- If available, provide the student with a placement pack, setting out useful information and standard procedures.
- Give the student a map of the building.

Strategies for Students:

- Devise your own template for recording information during handovers.
- Summarise instructions given to check understanding.
- Agree realistic target dates with your mentor for fulfilling placement competencies and daily tasks, and record these on the plan.
- Use coloured pens or highlighters to help organise and prioritise work.
- Use a small personal notebook or electronic diary – record any medications, words and phrases that are key to that placement.
- Create a simple flow chart on a small card as a memory aid.
- Have appropriate stationery to hand for taking messages, with as much information as possible filled out beforehand (e.g. date/ref/from).
- Read key information back to a telephone caller to double check the accuracy of your message taking.
- Devise some prompt sheets to help with tasks or sequencing of tasks. Mentors and supervisors could help with this.

Reading

Some students may:

- feel embarrassed about reading aloud; misread unfamiliar words; read very slowly and find scanning or skimming difficult; find text is distorted – particularly black print on white; find it difficult to read with noise distractions.
- have difficulty understanding medical and pharmacological language and abbreviations and/or differentiating between technical language such as drug names – particularly those that look or sound similar.
- have difficulty reading information from whiteboards.
- have difficulty reading information on charts if different layers of information are presented on one chart or if information is presented on different levels – reading both across and down.

Strategies for Practice Educators

- Where possible, produce charts/clinical document templates on coloured paper.
- Allow extra time for reading: give essential reading well in advance of meetings, highlighting important parts if appropriate.
- Provide opportunities to discuss readings.
- Any written information specifically produced for students would benefit from being 'dyslexia friendly'. Write in a logical sequence; avoid small print; use bullet points in preference to sentences; use simple words and space the information so it is not cramped; avoid overuse of jargon or uncommon words.
- Use colour and space on whiteboards to differentiate sections.

Strategies for Students

- Use a small alphabetical notebook to record useful words and meanings of abbreviations.
- Devise a card system for particularly difficult medical terms and abbreviations, with spelling on one side and meanings on the other.
- Use an electronic dictionary.
- Use mind maps or flow charts when appropriate.
- Use a coloured overlay, if appropriate.
- Use colour and space on whiteboards to differentiate sections.

Writing and Spelling

Some students may have difficulty with:

- Writing legibly, concisely and using appropriate language.
- Writing accurately – work might contain inconsistent spelling and frequent grammatical errors.
- Writing under time pressure – some students may write very slowly and need to redraft their work.
- Spelling technical terms, such as drugs and medical terms, especially those that look or sound similar. For example, gastrectomy and gastrotomy; hypertension and hypotension.
- Identifying numbers and letters and/or getting them in the correct order.
- Filling in forms, especially when required to do so at speed.

Strategies for Practice Educators

- Explain the relevance of any key information required.
- Help the student to compile a list of relevant professional terminology for the placement.
- Allow extra time to write reports and other paperwork.
- Allow students to write notes in draft form, to be checked before they are written up.
- Help the student to summarise the main points using a mind map, flow chart or bullet points, depending on their preference.
- Provide sample or 'model' report templates so the student has a clear idea about the level and content required and the expected format.
- Provide templates for letters, reports and forms etc.
- Where possible, allow the student to submit reports on cream paper with a dyslexia friendly font such as Arial.
- Avoid standing over the student whilst they are typing/writing to minimise anxiety.

Strategies for Students

- Ask your specialist study skills tutor (if you have one) to show you multi-sensory spelling techniques for words you find difficult to spell.
- It is important to be familiar with the layout of forms. Take time to familiarise yourself with them.
- If possible, use a recording device to note ideas, whilst maintaining patient confidentiality.
- Use a small personal dictionary or electronic speller. Keep a record of words and abbreviations commonly used at the placement.
- Devise templates for letters, memos and assessment reports.
- Develop effective checking procedures and proofreading skills.
- Use a laptop, PC or tablet for writing case notes, if available.

Language

Some students may:

- Struggle to find the right words or mispronounce unfamiliar words.
- Find it difficult to express themselves orally and talk in a disjointed way.
- Find it difficult to give clear instructions and/or information, and have a tendency to 'go off on a tangent'.
- Sometimes experience a 'mental block' or are unable to express ideas clearly, particularly when under stress.
- take everything 'literally' or at face value (beware of words with double meanings).

Strategies for Practice Educators

- If the student has difficulty with pronunciation of medical or other technical terms, an audio recording of specific language would be useful.
- Provide a checklist of vocabulary typical in the placement; e.g. drug names, common medical conditions and treatments.
- Give clear verbal instructions. Positive statements are important as some people with dyslexia are not able to 'read between the lines' or pick up on implied meaning.
- Be willing to repeat or reinforce instructions and encourage the student to have the confidence to ask questions.
- Encourage the student to repeat instructions back to you to check understanding.

Strategies for Students

- Build up a list of words and phrases frequently used in case notes, reports etc.
- Ask for clarification if you are not sure about any terminology.
- Use specialised reference books, such as Mosby's Medical Drug Reference, which gives the pronunciation of words.

Motor Skills

Some students with dyslexia:

- have right and left co-ordination difficulties.
- take much longer to learn to follow a sequence; e.g. wound dressing.
- may find setting up equipment difficult.

Strategies for Practice Educators

- Break complex tasks down into manageable chunks/subtasks.
- Provide plenty of opportunity for the student to practise tasks repeatedly until confident.
- Demonstrate skills more than once at the beginning of a placement.
- Supervise practice until the student is confident.
- Diagrams and flow charts can help.

Strategies for Students

- Ask for extra time to practise any skills you are unfamiliar with.
- In your mind, rehearse the sequence by visualising yourself working through
  it step by step.
- Practise talking through the sequence before doing it.
- Write the sequence down in the form of a diagram, flow chart or bullet points, whichever you prefer.

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Notes – Student

Student - how my dyslexia affects me:

Notes – Practice Educator

Student / Practice Educator – suggested strategies:

Sources of further information

CCCU Student Disability Service	disability@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 922576
CCCU Student Mental Wellbeing Service	mentalwellbeing@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 923056
CCCU Student Wellbeing Advisers	studentwellbeing@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 922675
British Dyslexia Association	www.bdadyslexia.org.uk	0333 405 4567
Dyslexia Action	www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk	01784 222304