



WAYNE STATE School of Medicine

Building a Culture of Support for Residents with Disabilities

Anne Messman, MD, R. Brent Stansfield, PhD, Heidi Kenaga, PhD, Martha Jordan, MEd
Graduate Medical Education Office, Wayne State University School of Medicine

Introduction

Residency training programs have an ethical and pedagogical responsibility to **ensure all trainees receive the resources, support, supervision, and mentorship** they need for professional development.

Through institution-level initiatives, the Wayne State University Graduate Medical Education office (WSUGME) helps **the 8 Wayne State University sole-sponsored residency programs** prioritize resident wellness and inclusiveness to foster an effective learning environment, including for those with disabilities:

- Anesthesiology
- Dermatology
- Family Medicine
- Internal Medicine
- Otolaryngology
- Preventive Medicine
- Transitional Year
- Urology

We sought to build the WSUGME's model of well-being and inclusion to **ensure that residents with physical, emotional, or cognitive challenges or disabilities receive the support they need.**

Methods

- **Conducted a 360 review** of residency and institutional policies about resident disclosure of and accommodations for disabilities.
- **Gathered stakeholder opinions** from DIO, the Graduate Medical Education Council (GMEC), and resident leadership.
- **Consulted with an industry leader**, an advocate for healthcare workers with disabilities to better align institutional policies with accreditation standards.
- **Sent a welcome letter** noting the updated policies to residents, faculty, and program leadership.
- **Published updated policies** online through the WSUGME's learning management portal.

WSUGME welcomes trainees with disabilities. We are committed to ensuring full and equal employment, access to public accommodation, and the provision of educational opportunities to all disabled qualified residents in training in our residency/fellowship programs.

Structure and Content of the Revised Policy:

- **Purpose:** "To ensure full and equal employment, public accommodation and educational opportunities to all disabled qualified residents..."
- **Policy:** "...to provide reasonable accommodation to people with known impairments"
- **Technical Standards for GME:** a detailed specification of qualifying disabilities. Trainee must be capable of delivering patient care: physical ability, cognitive ability, communication ability.
- **Responsibility for Implementation:** Names and links to the Employment Service Center of the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO).
- **Procedure for Requesting Reasonable Accommodation:** Trainee must disclose to OEO, who will determine reasonable accommodations.
- **Documentation of Disability:** Trainee must supply documentation to OEO.
- **Complaint Procedure:** Dispute resolution is conducted through OEO, contact information is given.

At his or her own discretion, trainee discloses a documented disability to the OEO

The OEO determines reasonable accommodations

The program provides accommodation

Trainee complaints and other disputes are handled internally through the OEO.

"We need to make sure that folks with disabilities feel welcome and that there's no reason for them to hide their disability. They don't have to disclose it, but they should feel comfortable if that's the decision they want."

- Dr. Anne Messman, Associate Dean of GME and DIO of WSU GME Office

Hear more from Dr. Messman on the *Docs with Disabilities* podcast (Episode 71: July 19, 2023)

<https://www.docswithdisabilities.org/docswithpodcast/episode/453a91c1/episode-71-dr-anne-messman>



Scan this QR code
To learn more about
WSU GME's Disabilities
Accommodation policies

Conclusion

Building an inclusive learning environment requires engagement of stakeholders at multiple levels and carefully-worded policy in line with national guidelines and best practices.

The policy centers the role of **WSU's Employment Service Center of the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO)**. The OEO provides neutral authority to determine accommodation and resolve disputes.

Dr. Lisa Meeks, a third-party industry leader noted that WSUGME's policies were some of the strongest in the country and interviewed the WSU DIO for the "Docs with Disabilities" podcast.

Resident training is stressful, an inclusive and effective learning environment must accommodate learners' disabilities to help them reach full professional development potential.

WSUGME will follow up on the impact of these policies with surveys and program reviews.

Resources and Links

- Wayne State University's Office of Equal Opportunity: <https://oeo.wayne.edu/>
- Docs with Disabilities podcast: <https://www.docswithdisabilities.org/docswithpodcast>
- Wayne State GME Office Disabilities Accommodation page: <https://gme.med.wayne.edu/disabilities-accommodation>