Dyslexia in Doctors

Gail Alexander
Dyslexia Lead: Professional Support Unit
Health Education England (Wessex)
Aims of the workshop

- Defining dyslexia
- Possible impacts of dyslexia on study and clinical placement
- What helps – generally
- Wessex research findings
- Scenarios: how medical educators can support dyslexic trainees
Activity

What do you think dyslexia is? Discuss with others and draft a definition.
Definition

The British Dyslexia Association (2007) defines **dyslexia** in the following way:

- Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which is neurobiological in origin and persists across the lifespan. It is characterised by difficulties with **phonological processing**, **rapid naming, working memory, processing speed** and the automatic development of skills that are **unexpected** in relation to an individual's other cognitive abilities. These processing difficulties can undermine the acquisition of **literacy and numeracy skills**, as well as musical notation, and have an effect on verbal communication, organisation and adaptation to change.
Dyslexia: main characteristics

**Often strong**
- Verbal/non verbal ability
- Creative approach

**Weaker**
- phonological awareness
- short-term auditory (working)memory
- unexpected delay in the development of literacy skills
- processing speeds

**Impacts on self-confidence**
John is an excellent trainee but has unfortunately failed four attempts at passing the MRCP 1. He describes a great difficulty in understanding the questions but has no difficulty responding to the same questions when they are put orally. Understandably, his confidence has suffered, and there is also a considerable degree of anxiety.

Case manager
My difficulty is with spelling and grammar. Reading out loud doesn’t flow very well, and I get very embarrassed when having to do so. A big problem is putting pen to paper and articulating my thoughts. The ePortfolio is a particular challenge to me as it takes a long time.

Trainee
Study challenges

- Revision techniques
- Passing exams
- Structuring essays
- Reading efficiency and recall
- Note taking
- Time keeping
- Reflective writing
- Lack of effective study skills
Clinical challenges
Joint research project involving 14 participants and 5 key informers with experience of dyslexia/dyspraxia

**Practice Guidance** of strategies by doctors with dyslexia for doctors with dyslexia on:

- Revision and exams
- Writing and spelling
- Reading
- Memory, time management and organisation
- Assistive technologies

View at
[http://www.wessexdeanery.nhs.uk/guidance_recourses/professional_support_unit/viritual_support_group_area/dyslexia_information.aspx](http://www.wessexdeanery.nhs.uk/guidance_recourses/professional_support_unit/viritual_support_group_area/dyslexia_information.aspx)
Clinical placement: What helps?

- Devising a system for duty lists
- Using Dictaphones to record letters
- Using Checklists
- Apps to check formula and drug names
- Templates for writing/reading
My supervisor gave me some useful advice: Do everything to complete a task unless there is an emergency, otherwise you end up with a lot of unfinished tasks.

We have a lot of letters that we have to read, and I find I really have to put aside time for doing that as it takes time to read through all the letters and get the information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study support: revision and exams what helps?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linking theory with real situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising a passage in a few words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with a variety of learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a healthy balance between book work and practice questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USING ACTIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devising a revision timetable/shorter revision sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching what you have learnt to a real or imaginary person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading every word in MCQs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing recall/ building in overlearning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Choose one or more case scenarios and discuss:

• The issues
• What would you advise
• What support could be put in place?
Reasonable adjustments

• Additional time in exams
• Coaching support
• An understanding and aware supervisor
• The opportunity to shadow others
• Time and space to complete paperwork
• Help in feeling comfortable about disclosing
• Challenging negative assumptions and promoting awareness
If you’re slow it will frustrate the team. He could record, if not he could ask not to be the key person and offer to do other tasks like job lists. I suffered a lot at first but as I developed I became more honest and colleagues appreciated this; I learnt to say I’m not very good at X but I can do Y.

GP trainee
Final thoughts

• Simple adjustments are often all that is needed
• Dyslexia can impact in different ways and at different times throughout training
• Every one with dyslexia has an individual profile
• Be flexible in your approach: ask what might help?
• Give practical help: introduce structures: show them; allow hands-on practice; repeat information; provide over learning opportunities
• Build upon the doctor’s strengths


GMC http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/plab/reasonable_adjustments.asp
http://www.gmc-uk.org/accessibility/assistive_technologies.asp
Resources 2

Dyslexia and Dyspraxia: Information for doctors

Dyspraxia
Dyspraxia Foundation
https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA84rQBRDCARI3APO8RFwJ6ZiyRmunHQsRN0e2o0ydMP7DpffQXp4s11Ji-MLoC3ZkTkg1uykIaAjzIEALw_wcB

Dyspraxia Checklist (Kirby)

The Equality Act

g.alexander6@tiscali.co.uk