



Health care professionals with lived experience of disability and neurodivergence exist – and they’re an asset to their workplaces.

They are disabled by barriers like preconceptions, attitudes, equipment and policies.

This guidance is a brief look at some of the tools and approaches we can use to remove those barriers. It has links to more resources online.

It is for everyone including union reps, managers, nurses, nursing support workers and nursing students.

It has been created based on the lived experience of the RCN Peer Support Group.

You can always find our most up-to-date guidance at:

▶▶ rcn.org.uk/peersupport

Disclosure

Most Peer Support Group members have good experiences when they disclose because they feel they can be their authentic self.

It can be necessary to get the changes and support required.

It is not essential though, unless there are concerns around carrying out roles safely.

Disclosing helps shift perceptions around the potential of health care professionals with health and disability issues.

But employers are not always supportive and sometimes disclosure can still lead to discriminatory behaviour.

It can be hard to prove that an employer knew they had a duty to make adjustments if they haven't been told about a disability.

Disclosure can be empowering – a chance to talk about skills and strengths, not negatives.

Be informed

The Equality Act 2010, or Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland, is the main legislation to consult when considering employer (and education provider) duties.

It defines being disabled as having a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

This legislation can be a useful 'lever' to negotiate what is needed for disabled individuals, but it should also be seen as a baseline for good practice; not the gold standard.

Could granting adjustments that are reasonable make good business sense regardless of whether the legal definition of disability is met?

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are adaptations at work including changes to working patterns, job descriptions and policies or procedures, the environment or the provision of training and additional equipment.

Health care professionals can and do have reasonable adjustments at work. Student nurses can also have adjustments on placement. By sharing success stories across organisations, we can show how much is possible.

Our Health Ability Passport guidance is all about reasonable adjustments:

▶▶ rcn.org.uk/Get-Help/Member-support-services/Peer-support-services/Health-Ability-Passport

Access to Work is a government scheme that can cover costs for some adjustments at work.
gov.uk/access-to-work



Valuable

Health care professionals with lived experience of disability bring skills, experience and knowledge.

They are a valuable resource and essential to addressing safe and effective staffing issues in the UK.

The challenges to perceptions that they bring, the positive message their work sends to disabled patients, and the more diverse workforce they contribute to enrich our health care sector.

To foster inclusion and diversity, it's important that these benefits are understood and believed. Otherwise the risk of a 'tick box exercise' remains.



To get the best fit for a role, you need to have access to the widest possible talent pool – that's why inclusive recruitment makes good business sense.

Proactive

Try to stop problems before they happen by:

- designing in inclusivity (such as when reviewing policy)
- welcoming and supporting disclosure from recruitment onwards
- focusing on solutions and being creative – whatever your role in the process
- upskilling and supporting those who need it, such as new managers, teams supporting a colleague with adjustments.

Why recruit if you can retain?
Adjustments are often simple, affordable and keep experience in the workplace.

Lived experience is key

It tells us where there is room to improve and why things have gone well.

It removes the assumptions about what is needed.

It shows what is possible.

Listen to member stories:

▶▶ rcn.org.uk/peer-support-member-stories

Staff networks are one way of engaging with lived experience in a workplace. Trade unions can support staff networks by providing information on employee rights and helping to advance staff concerns.

There's no one size fits all answer. Genuine engagement with others is the best way to ensure inclusivity.



The RCN Peer Support Service

This group is for you if you have lived experience of disability or neurodivergence.

Whether you identify as “having a disability” or not, the group exists to help remove disabling barriers so that you can thrive. It’s a group for all RCN members in every membership category.

We are health care professionals with physical impairments, mental ill health and neurodivergence. We might walk with an aid, have depression, be diagnosed with fibromyalgia, be autistic.

What we have in common is that we are all nurses, nursing support workers, or student nurses.

Together we:

- share experiences to support each other
- use our lived experience to inform the RCN’s messaging on disability and neurodivergence
- create guidance (like this!) to promote best practice.

Join the Peer Support Group online:

▶▶rcn.org.uk/join-peer-support



“I have felt the immense support from the group. They really understand..”

Wendy, Wales



Useful links

For employment advice, including help with discrimination issues, please visit:

rcn.org.uk/get-help/contact-advice

The Peer Support Service is part of Member Support Services. Find out how we can help you with your career, health and wellbeing, welfare benefit or immigration issues here:

rcn.org.uk/mss



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