A Review of Disability Accommodations Procedures at U.S.-based Medical Physics Residency Programs

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

159 U.S.-Based residency programs were selected from the list of CAMPEP accredited programs for therapy (117) and imaging (42). The author's program was not included in this endeavor. Webpages of selected programs were then investigated for the presence of accessibility information. This included searching for instances of the terms "disability", "accommodation", "accessibility" and their different affixations as well as the availability of a resident handbook, non-discrimination disclosures and readily found information on disability insurance. For programs hosted by larger institutions, the presence of non-discrimination disclosures and/or accessibility issues were also investigated. Of note, equal opportunity employer statements were considered as non-discrimination disclosures. Instances of "access" or "accommodation" not related to disability were not included in the count.

RESULTS

Of the programs investigated, it was found that 100 programs clearly stated that they currently participated in the Med-Phys match, 34 clearly stated they did not participate, 28 did not have their participation clearly stated on their website and 4 stated they conditionally participate in the match. Twelve (8%) therapy programs and two (1%) imaging programs had their residency handbooks publicly available and of those, six included information on the disability accommodations process (4 therapy, 2 imaging). Disability insurance information was explicitly found for 64 (40%) programs, 48 (30%) in therapy programs and 16 (10%) in imaging programs. The terms, or various affixations of, "Access/ible/ity", "Accommodation" and "Dis/ability" were found in 3 (2%), 6 (4%) and 3 therapy only program webpages, respectively, and in 6, 5 (3%), and 3 imaging only program webpages, respectively. Thirteen (8%) programs included non-discrimination statements independent of their institutions, 12 (7.5%) in therapy and one (<1%) in imaging. On institutional templating for therapy only programs, 44(28%) had accessibility information, 49 (31%) had non-discrimination statements, and 17 (14.5%) had both. On institutional templating for imaging only programs, 18(11.3%) had accessibility information, six (4%) had non-discrimination statements and 6 had both.

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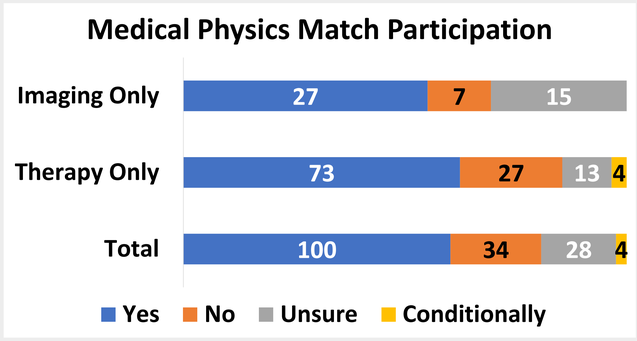
INTRODUCTION

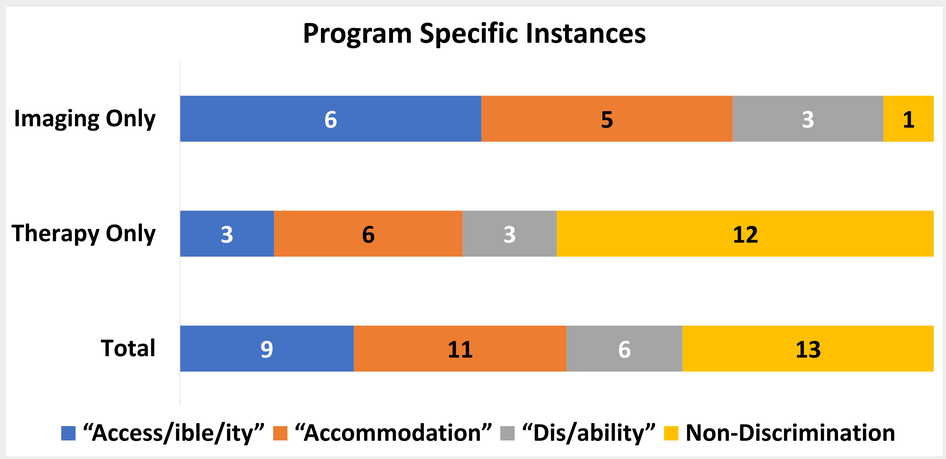
Although there have been many publications regarding disability accommodation within graduate medical education, the focus has primarily been on physician training.[1-3] However, there is a lack of data and scholarship on disability within the field of medical physics and medical physics training programs.[4,5] Nearly 25% of US adults live with one or more disability, a metric mirrored within the medical physics community. [5,6] Visible support of disability is necessary for increasing recruitment and retention, especially in the face of the increasing number of practicing physicists with disabilities and the documented shortages throughout the medical physics pipeline (Undergraduate→Graduate→Residency→Working Physicist).

Following the success of the 2023 *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Are Essential in Medical Physics* publication, there have been two disability-related medical physics publications. One served as a primer on disability for medical physicists while the other focused on improving accessibility in medical physics residency programs (MPRPs).[4,5,8] In support of fostering inclusive learning environments, the second publication advocates for having clear and well defined procedures for both disclosure and accommodations requests.[4] In order to understand the current landscape of accessibility support within residency programs, this work aims to evaluate CAMPEP-accredited medical physics residency programs within the United States for the presence of information related to disability and/or the accommodations process. The intention of this pilot investigation is for the information gathered to inform and encourage programs to publish clear steps for navigating medical physics residency as a disabled trainee.

Institutional Webpage links	Yes	No
Accessibility Information	49	85
Non-Discrimination Statement	53	81
Both	23	

Table 2. Presence of institutional accessibility information and non-discrimination statement as present on website templates hosting program information.





Program-Specific Webpages	Yes	No
Resident Handbook Publicly Available	14	144
Therapy Only	12	105
Imaging Only	2	40
Does Resident Handbook have disability/accommodations information	6	8
Therapy Only	4	8
Imaging Only	2	0
Availability of Disability Insurance Information	64	--
Therapy Only	48	--
Imaging Only	16	--
DEI Statement/Support for DEI	7	--

Table 1. Presence of match participation, resident handbook availability, disability insurance information, presence of the terms "Access/ible/ity", "Accommodation", or "Dis/ability", and presence of a non-discrimination notice

DISCUSSION

Navigating the medical physics landscape as a trainee is difficult and when the trainee has one or more disabilities, the path forward is that much more difficult. Contending with unintentional barriers and lack of accessibility with unclear guidance on seeking accommodations, finding a residency environment to thrive in only adds to their burden. Seen in the work presented here, only a small fraction of medical physics residency programs (MPRPs) included explicit, visible support for disabled trainees. In looking at the publicly available web presence for MPRPs within the United States, 11 programs included information about disability accommodations and of the 14 programs with publicly available handbooks, only six had information on the accommodations process. Several instances of accommodation information were tied directly to interviewing prospective residents with only a handful including the information for working as a resident within their program.

Many programs evaluated were housed and sponsored within larger institutions and universities, with their program webpages hosted on institutional templating. Within the programs this applies to, 49 included accessibility information and 53 included non-discrimination statements while 23 included both. Six of the 49 institutions providing accessibility information only provided information related to web accessibility. With the insights found during this investigation, there is a clear gap in visible and easy to follow support for disabled trainees. It is with this in mind that the author recommends medical physics residency programs critically review their web presence with a focus on accessibility to all. In striving for accessibility for all as a foundation, more than just trainees with disabilities will benefit.

CONCLUSIONS

Physicists with disabilities are inherently in a more vulnerable position than their peers and should be supported by clearly addressing accessibility issues. Faced with workforce shortages, residency bottlenecking and the increasing number of medical physicists with disabilities, the medical physics community must step up to support efforts to increase accessibility within our profession. Residency programs should seek to partner with their institutional disability services, ADA compliance offices and reach out to disability advocates and professionals to increase their visible support of prospective residents with disabilities.

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