

# **DISABILITY STIGMA** **IN HEALTHCARE**

Kristin Fleschner

# PLAN FOR ENDING ABLEISM IN HEALTHCARE

- Why Am I Here?
- What Is Disability Stigma/ Ableism
- What Does Ableism Look like in Patient Care
- How to better interact with blind and visually impaired and other disabled patients
- Understanding Disability Identity
- Barriers

**WHEN YOU'RE PRETENDING  
TO BE PRODUCTIVE AT WORK**



**BUT YOU'RE REALLY READING  
KRISTIN & ZOE'S NEWSLETTER**



## WHAT IS DISABILITY STIGMA

- **Ableism** means the practices and dominant attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. And the set of practices and beliefs that assign inferior value and worth to people who have developmental, emotional, physical or psychiatric disabilities.
  - In many cultures disability is associated with curses, disease, dependence, and helplessness.

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Stereotyping
- Discrimination
- Condescension
- Internalization
- Violence and/or Bias-Motivated Crimes/Hate Crimes



# WAYS THIS COULD AFFECT YOUR WORK

- Concealing disability, assistive devices, or health conditions
- Vs. Extreme Pride of having Disability
- Vs. making a medical decision based on discrimination or the how it will allow one to integrate socially



# HOW TO INTERACT WITH A VISUALLY IMPAIRED OR BLIND PATIENT?

- Respectful Communication
  - Speak to patient, use eye-contact
  - Do ask preferred methods of [communication](#)
  - Do use normal instructions
  - Do use ordinary language, “See you later”
    - Different than ablest language “hearing-impaired” “handicapped” “turn a blind-eye to” “She suffers from...”



# RESPECT PRIVACY

- Privacy and Autonomy of Disabled
  - Provide materials in accessible formats, including intake materials before appointments due to lack of privacy/time in office and web portal inaccessibility
    - If patient can't fill intake out upon arrival provide a private area with a qualified health professional to assist
    - Make sure there is accessible parking and office space is accessible
    - Do ask a patient if they need assistance, never touch a patient, their dog, or other devices without asking

# RESPECT IDENTITY

- The Importance of Disability Identity
  - Understand and respect your patients reasons for concealing or highlighting their disability in their medical choices.
  - Do be an advocate for your patient if needed.
  - Do not tell you patient what you would do, or think about how you would act if you were going blind, deaf, etc.

**BLIND**



A photograph of a graduation ceremony. In the foreground, a light-colored dog is lying on a white cloth on the ground, wearing a black graduation cap and gown. Behind it, several graduates are seated in rows, also wearing black gowns and caps with pink stoles. The background shows green trees and a bright, sunny day.

## HOW STIGMA TURNS INTO REAL BARRIERS

### Healthcare Gaps for Americans with Disabilities:

- Lack of preventative Care
  - Blind and VI Patients- Transportation,
  - Finances- 74% of Blind Americans without a job; 25 percent of Americans have disability
    - Health Insurance- domino effect
  - Health Risk Factors that cause more problems. Weight Gain, Depression, etc.
  - Many patients report that doctors don't see the link between their disability and the other conditions

# BARRIERS

- Attitudinal Barriers
  - Patronizing- diabetes care, mental health
    - “This is not fair” Response: “Your blind, you should know that fare is what you pay when you get on a bus.”
  - Rare Disease Patients- Don’t know needs- Merry-Go-Round of Specialists
  - Communication Barriers
  - Do provide continued training to front office staff, nurses, etc.

# DEEP DIVE INTO ONLINE COMMUNICATION

- Flexibility of communication during COVID.
- Eliminates many barriers
- No vendors focusing on disabled population
- Look towards Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and to the Affordable Care Act.



## RESOURCES

- Legal, Practical, and Ethical Considerations for Making Patient Portals Accessible to All (Pre-COVID pub) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5607665/>
- HHS/OCR COVID Bulletin:  
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr-bulletin-3-28-20.pdf>
- If you or someone you care for are facing discrimination in receiving COVID-19 treatment due to a disability you can reach out to the Disaster Survivors with Disabilities Hotline. Hotline Phone: (800) 626-4959; Email: [Dustin@disasterstrategies.org](mailto:Dustin@disasterstrategies.org)
- Global Web Accessibility Guidelines-  
<https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag>

Thanks!  
Any questions?

[www.kristinfleschner.com](http://www.kristinfleschner.com)

[contact@kristinfleschner.com](mailto:contact@kristinfleschner.com)

Join #ZoesPack @zoetheseeingdog on FB,  
IG, Twitter to learn more

