

Episode: Author Interview: “How Should We Build Disability Inclusive Medical School Admissions?”

Guest: Lisa Meeks, PhD, MA

Hosts: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview Series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative format for accessing the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Lisa Meeks, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Family Medicine at the University of Colorado Medical School in Aurora, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Family Medicine at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a researcher with the University of California Davis Center for a Diverse Health Care Workforce. Dr Meeks is also the co-host of the podcast *Docs with Disabilities*, and listeners of our podcast this month should check out their episode, *Medical School Admissions for Students with Disabilities*. Now, though, Dr Meeks is here to discuss her article coauthored with Dr Christopher Moreland, [How Should We Build Disability Inclusive Medical School Admissions?](#), in the December 2021 issue of the Journal, *Health Justice and Diversity in Medical School Admissions*. Dr Meeks, thank you so much for taking the time to be here.

DR LISA MEEKS: Thank you so much for having us.

HOFF: To begin with, what is the main ethics point being made in your article?

MEEKS: Yeah. So, we really focused on the unjust obstacles that persist for people with disabilities that are looking to matriculate into medical school. And these include things like ableist mindsets, access to technical standards, outdated and discriminatory technical standards, the way that applicants are evaluated—so, lack of understanding about disability in the evaluations process—and then really understanding what reasonable accommodations are and what can be employed to make sure that a student can meet technical standards. So, I think there’s a lack of education in this space, and we talk about that discretely with each of these kind of more thematic elements.

HOFF: What do you think is the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article?

MEEKS: So, most important thing, I think, for Dr Moreland and myself, is that we understand that there are issues with the admissions system. And in many cases, disability inclusion is very new to admissions deans and to admissions staff, and we are actively calling for change, as are many institutions that are already implementing change, especially in their technical standards. But this work is also being supported by associations like the AAMC and coalitions like the Coalition for Disability Access in Health Science Education. So, there’s a lot of work that is being done, and we are aware of these issues and working actively to address them.

HOFF: Wonderful. And if you could add a point to your article that you don't feel like you got to fully explore, what would that be?

MEEKS: That's a great question. I really, really appreciated this question. For me, I think there's so much power in storytelling and sharing experiences. I think it's a powerful mechanism for reducing bias and also for driving systems change. So, one thing that I really wanted to do in the article, but we were not actually able to fully explore is, to encourage trainees and physicians to share their stories of success in medicine. And I really believe that with each story, whether it's via a commentary—there are lots of commentaries out there about physicians with disabilities—whether it be a podcast like this, or serving on a panel to talk about disability inclusion, I think each time we share a story, we break down the attitudinal barriers just a little bit more. And so, I would encourage the listener and physicians and trainees with disabilities to continue to share their stories.

HOFF: And as a reminder, people who are interested can go listen to your podcast, *Docs with Disabilities*. But in the meantime, thank you so much for your contribution to the Journal and for being on the podcast this month. [theme music returns]

MEEKS: Thank you for asking. We really appreciate the opportunity.

HOFF: To read the [full article](#) and the rest of the December 2021 issue for free, visit our site, JournalofEthics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.