W.I.S.C.

The International Women in Supramolecular Chemistry Network

What will a chemistry lab look like in the future? Raising awareness and consulting to create the accessible, inclusive lab of the future

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It can be isolating to be a member of a minority group whatever your career stage, but particularly as a graduate student: Susan Stiver Lie said "storming the tower is a lonely business, as any academic woman who has tried can tell you."

Being disabled, neurodivergent, or having a chronic illness in academia is not the norm.[1] Up to 30 % of the general population is thought to have a condition that would be recognised under the 2010 Equality Act,[2] compared to 16 % of the working age population and just 4 % of academics.[3] Whilst disclosure rates are slowly increasing across the sector, this varies according to discipline,[4] with the physical sciences, and subjects with the greatest gender imbalance having the lowest disclosure rates.[5] Ableism in academia is endemic.[6,7] Decisions to disclose a condition or disability are personal,[8] and have to take into account a weighing up of perceived and actual risks versus benefits.

Disability, just like other protected characteristics, is intersectional. This means that those who have other protected characteristics due to their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, age, or sexuality face compounded barriers. In order to increase diversity in chemistry it is imperative to increase the culture of inclusivity and accessibility, as well as address physical barriers that individuals face in the laboratory.

One way to combat feelings of isolation is for people to establish their own networks to help themselves and each other.

Access our community and find out more by contacting WISC at info@wisc.network or follow us @suprachem

References:
1 W. Joice and A. Tetlow, Disability STEM data for students and academic staff in higher education 2007/08 to 2018/19, London, 2021.
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4 HESA, Who's working in HE?, 2020.
5 CRAC, Qualitative research on barriers to progression of disabled scientists, London, 2021.
6 N. Brown and J. Leigh, Ableism in academia: Theorising experiences of disabilities and chronic illnesses in higher education, UCL Press, London, 2020.
7 N. Brown, Ed., Lived experiences of ableism in academia: Strategies for inclusion in higher education, Policy Press, Bristol, 2021.
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This project will explore barriers that synthetic chemistry lab environments pose to researchers with neurodivergence / disability / chronic illness, then design and showcase the inclusive lab of the future in a series of events using virtual reality.

The inclusive, accessible lab might include:

- **Floor-to-ceiling fumehoods, to accommodate people of different heights,**
- **Lab benches of different heights with space for chairs for those who need to sit down regularly,**
- **A 'quiet space' away from all the noise of the pumps, air flow, sonicators, rotorvaps, etc.,**
- **Platform sharing to enable the ability to set up an experiment from home.**

For more suggestions, visit https://bit.ly/3HPrvXd

Our support clusters provide safer spaces for people to connect, share experiences, and learn. We have a
***Parenting Cluster,**
***Disability/Chronic Illness/Neurodivergence Cluster,**
and are launching a
***1st Gen Cluster.**

WISC's website **www.womeninsuprachem.com** has details of events, our mentoring programme, community clusters, and lots of resources and links.

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