Teaching students with chronic health problems

General Information

Students may also experience chronic health problems which significantly limit a major life activity. While having a chronic health problem is not necessarily disabling, the impact of the condition, such as hospitalizations, medication effects, etc., may significantly limit the individual within the academic environment. Side effects that may negatively impact on academic performance include: fatigue, memory loss, drowsiness, loss of concentration, euphoria, mental confusion, and excessive absences. Commonly associated disorders include: asthma, lupus, cancer, HIV/AIDS, chronic pain, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, arthritis, seizure disorder, diabetes, and Crohn’s disease.

While each instructor knows the demands of his/her own class, the following questions may be considered so that classroom information is accessible to the student:

- Is it possible that the student will have to miss class? If so, what arrangements will need to be made?
- Has the student ever utilized time management techniques such as daily, weekly, and/or monthly calendars?
- What specifically are the physical limitations that impact the student’s learning?
- Would a note taker be helpful?
- What aids, besides the textbook, are most helpful to the student?
- Has the student ever used a tape recorder to tape class notes?

Suggestions for Communication

Most people with disabilities do not mind talking frankly about the disability. Understanding and awareness of the facts promotes acceptance and integration.

Academic Considerations

- As students with chronic health impairments may have reduced endurance or concentration, they may benefit from the provision of outlines prior to class or a very brief review of previous material before introducing new information.
- Students with health problems often show more absences than other students. Maintain open communication with these students and make allowances for absences (extended time for assignments, not penalizing for assignments turned in late, etc.).
- Because of potential reduction in their stamina, these students may better demonstrate their knowledge of a subject through a series of shortened tests, rather than a few evaluations throughout the semester.
- Appropriate testing alternatives may include a distraction free testing location and/or extended time.

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