

Disability Awareness – What Does Disability look like?

In our welcome statement – all are welcome at Trinity! This month I wanted to hold up those who are disabled. We all have our own definition of what disabled means, but it is much more than we may consider. The World Health Organization (WHO) published the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in 2001 that covers eight sub-categories of disability types that include various physical and mental impairments that can interfere with or reduce a person's ability to carry out his day to day activities.

We recognize those with physical impairments who use assistive devices such as a cane, walker or wheelchair as having a disability. But we need to recognize those with physical impairments that aren't obvious or those with mental illness or cognitive disabilities. There are 8 sub-categories of disabilities which include the following:

- Mobility and Physical Impairments
- Spinal Cord Disability
- Head Injuries (TBI) - Brain Disability
- Vision Disability
- Hearing Disability
- Cognitive or Learning Disabilities
- Psychological Disorders
- Invisible Disabilities

Most of these categories are self-explanatory, but I want to briefly touch on invisible disabilities. Invisible Disabilities are certain kinds of disabilities that are not immediately apparent to others. It is estimated that 10% of people in the U.S. have a medical condition considered a type of invisible disability. These people may not use an assistive device and most look and act perfectly healthy.

People with some kinds of invisible disabilities have symptoms occurring due to chronic illness, chronic pain, sleep disorders, injury, birth disorders etc. Although the disability creates a challenge for the person who has it, the reality of the disability can be difficult for others to recognize or acknowledge. Remember that others are struggling even if you cannot see evidence of it in a visible way.

You may think, "Couldn't I be classified as disabled?" Possibly – but there are nearly one in two people in the U.S. with a chronic medical condition of one kind or another, but most of these people are not considered to be disabled, as their medical conditions do not impair their normal everyday activities.

All Are Welcome in This Place, so let's be aware of limitations that others have and acknowledge and support these differences.

To Your Health,
Lynn Sienkiewicz, RN
TLC Parish Nurse