

# ASCILITE 2024

## Navigating the Terrain:

*Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies*

### **It doesn't need to be so stressful! Exploring Medical Students with ADHD Online Learning Experiences through a Self-Determination Theory**

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The rapid development of the online delivery in higher education has resulted in a proliferation of research. Key in this work are two critical streams: how to support diverse students in online learning spaces, and the need for greater theorisation to guide educators on the optimal design of such pedagogies. In this study we bring these two streams together by harnessing the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) to explore the experiences of medical students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in their online learning experiences. In doing so, we contribute key theoretical and practical knowledge on supporting innovative, inclusive online learning spaces for our increasingly diverse student cohorts.

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Studies indicate that the prevalence of ADHD in higher education settings is significant, and medical students are not exempt from this trend with self-reported prevalence suggests it could be as high as 24% (Emmers et al., 2017; Njuwa et al., 2020; Sedgwick-Müller et al., 2022). The nature of medical education, characterised by heavy workloads, time pressures, and complex material, can further pose unique challenges for individuals with ADHD affecting academic performance, professionalism and overall well-being (Im & Tamarelli, 2023). The literature implies that motivational alterations, particularly focusing on internal motivations, exist in people with ADHD, acting as mediators between environmental and social contexts and outcomes including behaviour and performance. Thus, what is the key in this issue is how students are supported to develop and enact their SDT to foster optimal engagement and ultimately their well-being and inclusion (Morsink et al., 2022).

In this presentation we will present our findings of semi-structured interviews with medical students diagnosed with ADHD (n=10). Specifically, our study will organise results in relation to the three dimensions of SDT including: student autonomy, competence and relatedness. Findings include the students' perceptions of the challenges related to flexible delivery, and how greater choice also at times led to barriers around their study decision-making (e.g., to attend lectures, to study asynchronously). Through our presentation we will further provide recommendations on strategies to create inclusive, autonomy-supportive online learning spaces for ADHD students in higher education settings.

*Keywords:* ADHD, medical students, online learning experience, Self-Determination Theory, inclusive education

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