

The Medical Trainee with Learning Disabilities/ADHD

UT Southwestern Medical Center Effective
Teaching Series

December 15, 2004

Cheryl Silver, Ph.D.

Jeffrey Black, M.D.

Learning Objectives

1. List characteristics of developmental dyslexia and ADHD in the young adult.
2. Describe how LD/ADHD is manifested at different stages of medical training.
3. State how LD and ADHD can be accommodated during medical school.
4. Explain the rights of medical trainees with LD/ADHD to accommodations.
5. Discuss services that UTSW provides for medical trainees with LD/ADHD.

Learning Disabilities

NJCLD Definition

... a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifest by significant difficulties in the acquisition and the use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities ...
intrinsic... central nervous system dysfunction ... across the life span ... not the result of ... conditions or influences

Verbal (Language) Learning Disorders (Shaywitz)

- primary deficit involves both phonologic and semantic-syntactic aspects
- problems with oral language, reading decoding and comprehension, written expression, math word problems

Non-Verbal Learning Disorders (Rourke)

- math is weakest academic area
- limited monitoring, planning, problem solving
- problems with visual-perceptual organization

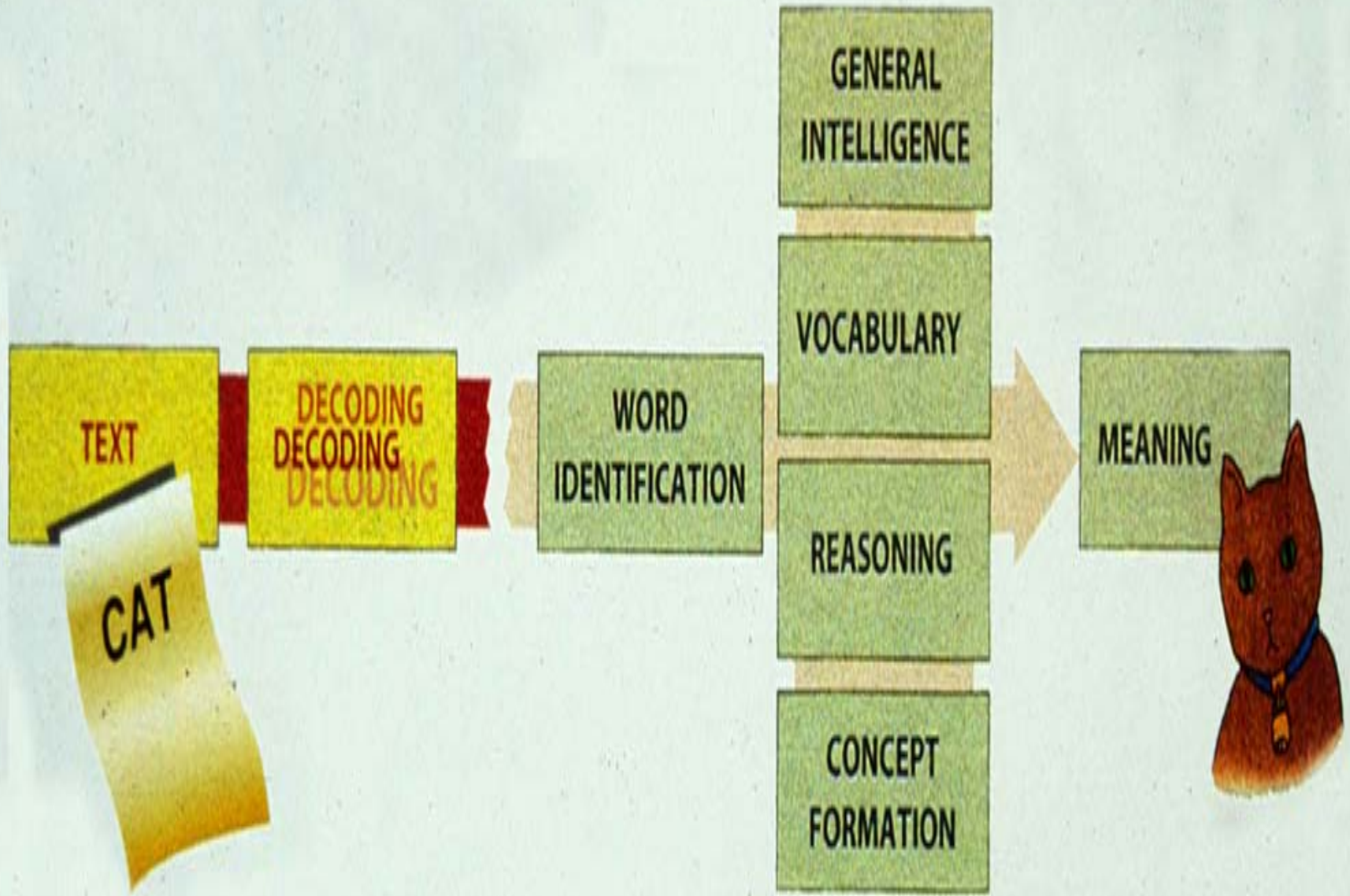
Developmental Dyslexia

Phonologic deficit primary

Reading impairment at the level of single-word decoding

Other components of language system intact (e.g. syntax, semantics)

Intelligence not affected and may be in superior or gifted range.



Clues to Dyslexia in Young Adults

- struggle to retrieve words and weak rote memorization
- trouble pronouncing and reading uncommon words
- word reading accuracy improves but remains slow, labored
- unusually long hours spent reading school or work related materials
- poor performance on spelling, timed and multi-choice tests

LD Incidence

- 10-15% of school age children
- 3% of college freshman and medical students
- 70% of students with LD have LLD
- 50% of LD students entering college are undiagnosed
- 30-50% of LD students have co-morbid ADHD

Characteristics of Medical Trainees with Learning Disabilities

Academic/Cognitive Deficits

Slow reading and poor spelling

Reading comprehension and writing problems usually secondary

Difficulty with multiple choice tests

Performance drops under time pressure

Poor time management if ADHD coexists

Characteristics of Medical Trainees with Learning Disabilities

Affective/Coping Issues

Low self-esteem and dysphoria

Fearful of disclosure and isolated

Reluctant to ask for help

Characteristics of Medical Trainees with Learning Disorders

Common Positive Attributes

Above average high-level conceptualization

Intact verbal skills

Strong visual-spatial analytic skills

High work capacity

Resilience

Empathy

Impact of LD/ADHD at Different Stages of Training

Pre-Clinical Years

Voluminous amounts of reading

More abstract course content

Note taking

Saliency determination

Study skills and test taking

Impact of LD/ADHD at Different Stages of Training

Clinical Years (3-4) and Residency

Applied course content

Forced oral responses

Hands on treatment

Relating to others

Organization skills/time management

DSM-IV:

**Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
(ADHD)**

1. Predominantly inattentive type
2. Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type
3. Combined type

Criteria

Must be present in childhood

Must create problems in more than one setting

Must produce functional impairment

3-7% prevalence in children

6 males: 1 female

50% compensate by adulthood

Manifestations in Adults

Mind wanders

Forgetful

Spaced out

Procrastination problems

Disorganization

Manifestations in Adults

Doesn't like sitting around

Easily stressed out

Can't stick with things

Irritable or impatient

Diagnostic Confounds – Compared With

Hypomania – mood less elevated, more transient

Depression – more transient & circumscribed

Borderline personality – less black & white thinking

Anxiety – less rumination, no autonomic symptoms

Introduction to the ADA

ADA

A civil rights act

Guarantees that no discrimination exists based on a disability

Primary issue – equal access

Disability

Physical or mental impairment

Limits a major life activity

Relative to expectations for the average
person

For the Medical Trainee

Not just a relative weakness

Not just a problem in a high demand environment

Not just having to work harder than others

Accommodations – Concepts

Equal access to the learning process

“Reasonable” accommodations

Without undue hardship

Without posing a threat to safety

Taking Action at UT Southwestern

Policy

Process

Resources

Documentation

Trainee bears the burden of documentation

At trainee's own expense

Resources

Office of Associate Dean of Student Affairs

Student Academic Assistance Services, OME, x-89590

Student Mental Health, x-82612

Recommendations

Change study environment

Use a planning calendar, etc.

Use study strategies

Change information modalities

Stress management or counseling

Consider a trial of medication

Accommodations

Change teaching format

Change testing format

- special testing room

- modified exams

- extended time

Tutoring

Well Known Dyslexics in Medicine

Harvey Cushing

Pioneer Surgeon

Paul Ehrlich

Bacteriologist

Graeme Hammond

Transplant Surgeon

Delos M. Cosgrove

Cardiovascular Surgeon