

HLB Honors Disability Pride Month with Dr. O – Physician, Advocate, Athlete

Insights

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Disability Pride Month is celebrated every July to mark the [anniversary](#) of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – a historic piece of [legislation](#) that established rights for people with disabilities in public life. Boston held the first Disability Pride event in 1990, following the passage of the ADA, and celebrations in other cities followed. In honor of Disability Pride Month, we are proud to honor Dr. Oluwaferanmi O. Okanlami, M.D., M.S., an individual whose ability to share his medical expertise and personal experiences has made a profound impact.

Dr. Oluwaferanmi [Okanlami](#), or “Dr. O,” was born in Nigeria to physician parents, before immigrating to the United States where he attended school in Indiana and Massachusetts. He went to Stanford University, where he was captain of the track and field team and achieved Academic All-American recognition. Upon graduation, he matriculated to the University of Michigan and then marched into Orthopaedic Surgery at Yale.

During his third year of residency at Yale New Haven Hospital in Connecticut, Dr. O experienced a spinal cord injury from a diving accident, paralyzing him from the chest down. After two surgeries and [rehabilitation](#), he was able to gain back some motor function. Dr. O went on to earn a Master’s in Engineering, Science, and Technology Entrepreneurship from The University of Notre Dame and completed his Family Medicine Residency in South Bend, Indiana. He then returned to Michigan to accept a position at the University of Michigan as Director of Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services and as Assistant Professor of Family Medicine, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, and Urology at Michigan Medicine. He also is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

After his injury, Dr. O [stated](#) that he started to see life from the “other side of the stethoscope” and has worked to “disabuse disability” – a [saying](#) he coined to demonstrate that disability does not mean inability. In line with that motto, he started an adaptive sports and fitness [program](#) at the University of Michigan, that strives to advocate for institutional, structural and policy changes that support equitable opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in physical activity, among other critical initiatives. The program has grown and in June 2024, University of Michigan Adaptive Sports & Fitness hosted its inaugural [Miller Family Open](#), where athletes from the University of Alabama, University of Arizona and San Diego State University competed and had a chance to meet qualifying marks to be invited to the USA Paralympic Trials.

On the academic front, Dr. O and his University of Michigan’s Department of Family Medicine colleagues work to raise awareness about physicians with disabilities, launching the [Docs With Disabilities Initiative](#) and corresponding social media [campaign](#). The [CDC](#) estimates that 27% of adults in the United States have a disability. However, according to AAMC [data](#), only about 3% of physicians in the United States have a disability. The Docs with Disabilities Initiative [produces](#) publications and conducts research to “drive change and increase representation through building inclusive educational environments for learners with disabilities.”

Dr. O has served as the Disability Issues representative on the Steering Committee for the Group on Diversity and Inclusion at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), was appointed to President Biden’s [Council](#) on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition, and sits on the National Medical Association’s Council on Medical Legislation.