**Models of disability**

**Medical Model**

*Disability is a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (DDA 1995).*

The focus is on the individual as the cause of the problem. This is offensive, placing disabled people outside what is considered ‘normal’ and represents an old-fashioned, disempowering concept.

**Charity Model**

The Tragedy/Charity Model is condemned by its critics as dis-enabling, and the cause of much discrimination. It positions disabled people as tragic victims, it follows therefore that they need care, are not capable of looking after themselves or managing their own affairs, and need charity in order to survive.

The idea of being recipients of charity lowers the self-esteem of disabled people. In the eyes of "pitying" donors, charitable giving carries with it an expectation of gratitude and a set of terms imposed upon the beneficiary. The first is patronising; the second limiting upon the choices open to disabled people.

**Social Model**

*“Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the mainstream life of a community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers”.* The British Council of Disabled People

This suggests that the removal of attitudinal, physical and institutional barriers will improve the lives of disabled people, giving them the same opportunities as others on an equitable basis. Taken to its logical conclusion, there would be no disability within a fully developed society.

It places the onus upon society and not the individual; it focuses on the needs of the individual whereas the medical model uses diagnoses to produce categories of disability, assuming that people with the same impairment have identical needs and abilities.

As a teacher in Higher Education you cannot anticipate every circumstance, but by being more conscious of the statistics and indicators, and engaging with the social model, you may avoid having to make so many ‘reasonable’ adjustments…