

Chapter 15

Challenges and Implications of Health Literacy in Global Health Care

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explains the perspectives on health literacy, trends and issues with health literacy, and the challenges and implications of health literacy in global healthcare. Health literacy concerns the knowledge and competences of patient to meet the complex demands of health in modern healthcare. Providing effective patient information means acknowledging, understanding, and overcoming barriers to health literacy that physicians, health professionals, and patients might experience. Health literacy affects health behavior and the use of health services, thus affecting health outcomes and health costs in the healthcare organizations. The benefits of health literacy improvement include improved communication, greater adherence to treatment, greater ability to engage in self-care, improved health status, greater healthcare efficiency, and cost savings to the healthcare systems.

INTRODUCTION

The specific level of health literacy is required for patients to fully understand health information and services to make effective decisions about their health care, including decisions about screening and treatment (Koay, Schofield, & Jefford, 2012). Being able to employ a certain degree of control is recognized as a precondition for the active patient participation and is often discussed concerning health literacy (Nutbeam, 2008). Patients' perceived control over their care is indicated by their perceived ability to perform the self-care activities in the home environment, to interact effectively with health care providers, and to organize care at the right moment (Coulter, 2012). Older patients and patients who are less educated about their health care condition are more likely to have the lower health literacy, visit their health care provider more frequently, and perceive more difficulties in exerting control over their care than the highly educated younger patients (Dahlke, Curtis, Federman, & Wolf, 2014).

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This article aims to bridge the gap in the literature on the thorough literature consolidation of health literacy. The extensive literature of health literacy provides a contribution to practitioners and researchers by describing the challenges and implications of health literacy in order to promote the health literacy in global health care.

BACKGROUND

Health literacy is a complicated perspective that depends on the individuals' ability to communicate and the demands posed by society and health care system (Baker, 2006). Lack of specific skills and knowledge associates with health literacy has been shown to negatively affect the people's understanding and use of information provided by health professionals (Rubinelli, Schulz, & Nakamoto, 2009). Effective health care strategies can be used by health care providers to address the serious health care-related problem, including the effective health communication, development of health education materials, professional education, and development of health care community partnerships (Corrarino, 2013). Developing educational materials aimed at individuals with low health literacy, as well as training health care providers on how to effectively communicate with individuals with limited literacy, should be promoted (Ojinnaka et al., 2015). Lupattelli et al. (2014) indicated that clinicians should take time to inquire into their patients' ability to understand health information, perception, and beliefs regarding health literacy.

THEORY AND APPLICATIONS OF HEALTH LITERACY

This section emphasizes the perspectives on health literacy; trends and issues with health literacy; and the challenges and implications of health literacy in global health care.

Perspectives on Health Literacy

Health literacy encompasses several abilities including word recognition, reading comprehension, communication skills, and conceptual knowledge (Macek et al., 2010). The components of literacy include reading, writing, verbal communication, numeracy, and conceptual knowledge (Nielsen-Bohlman, Panzer, & Kindig, 2004). Federman et al. (2009) stated that memory and verbal communication fluency are strongly associated with health literacy. Effective communication among health professions is a necessary component of health care, as no single profession can adequately respond to the complexity of health problems that patients may possess (Barr, 2002).

While health literacy is a complex concept that includes many components, print prose and print document literacy are two essential health literacy skills that help patients understand the written health information (Baker, 2006). Written health information can be found in various areas of health, and includes medical instructions, medication information, disease information, admission forms, informed consent materials, and other examples (Hadden, 2015).

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