

Health literacy: Emerging evidence, applications and new directions

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Health literacy represents the communication among patients, their social networks, providers, and health systems to promote patients' understanding

and engagement in their care. This is widely relevant in all aspects of health care irrespective of populations or settings.

Various conceptual models to depict the role of health literacy and patient outcomes and numerous measures have been developed to measure the constructs and its dimensions. While methodologies across studies may differ, there is consensus that low HL is associated with poor outcomes including less preventive health behaviors, more hospitalizations, and a higher risk of mortality. Empirical research work across various populations and setting is growing rapidly. This special issue brings together a selection of papers to highlight the multimodal perspectives on HL and raise interesting questions for further research.

Paul Gellert and Florian Tille in their paper "What do we know already? The role of health knowledge within theories of health" attempt to disentangle the relation between health literacy and health knowledge. They argue for the clarification of the role of health knowledge within HL theories in order to better conceptualize and design interventions to improve health literacy.

Since living in an era of technology, we cannot talk about health literacy without addressing the issue of eHealth literacy. Efrat Neter, Esther

Brainin and Oran Baron-Epel in "The dimensionality of health literacy and eHealth literacy" examine the dimensionality of health literacy and eHealth literacy constructs using established measures.

In order to improve health literacy, one may intervene either at the level of health professionals or at the level of patients. The paper by Alden Yuanhong Lai, Aya Goto and Rima Rudd in "Advancing health literacy from a system perspective: Health literacy training for healthcare professionals" discusses the issue of health literacy training in health professionals, using a concrete example of a training conducted in Fukushima.

Julia Amann, Sara Rubinelli and Gary Kreps in "Revisiting the concept of health literacy. The patient as information seeker and provider" address health literacy from the perspective of patients, namely the importance of the patient as health information seeker and provider. This paper names current shortcomings of the health literacy debate by drawing attention to the currently under-investigated role of the patient as information provider. Recognizing the potential of peer-to-peer health communication, the authors highlight the importance of conceptualizing and operationalizing health literacy in the context of information sharing.

Mahatti Chitem, Venkatesh Boddu, Ramesh Babu Byrapaneni, Kirsti Sarham Anthun explore in their paper "What has access and skills got to do with it? A qualitative study exploring health literacy among Indian IT employees" the issue of health literacy in a particular group of IT employees, showing how the work place can

become an important venue where one measures and changes health literacy levels.

Peter Kolarcik, Andrej Belak and Richard Osborne in "Using health literacy alongside grounded and participatory approaches to develop interventions in partnership with marginalised populations: The Ophelia (OPTimise HEalth LIteracy and Access) Process" raise the issue of improving health literacy in marginalised groups such as the Roma population. They report on findings from intervention studies and emphasize that health literacy is especially relevant when working with vulnerable groups. They use the case example of the Roma population in Czech Republic to illustrate the potential of a newly developed, grounded and participatory approach to development of health-literacy and health-care access interventions for equity – the Ophelia (OPTimising HEalth LIteracy and Access) process (Batterham et al., 2014). Their paper raises attention to the relation between health literacy and equity.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

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