

Health Literacy: Crucial for Better Outcomes

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Introduction

Health literacy is fundamentally important for empowering individuals to manage their health proactively, enabling them to make informed decisions for better health outcomes and the broader public good [1].

Healthcare professionals must tailor communication to ensure health information is accessible and actionable for everyone, regardless of background [1].

The crucial link between digital health literacy, engagement with eHealth tools, and effective diabetes management is evident [2].

Better digital health literacy improves patient engagement, leading to more successful self-management strategies [2].

This really points to the need for accessible digital tools and targeted education to bridge the digital divide in healthcare [2].

Higher health literacy positively influences patients' ability and willingness to participate in shared decision-making [3].

Fostering health literacy can genuinely empower patients to become active partners in their treatment plans [3].

There is a significant association between low health literacy and poor medication adherence in patients with chronic diseases [4].

Individuals with limited health literacy often struggle to understand prescriptions and treatment regimens, leading to suboptimal health outcomes [4].

What this really means is that improving health literacy is a crucial step for improving medication adherence and disease management [4].

Interventions aimed at improving health literacy among older adults include educational programs, simplified health communication strategies, and digital tools [5].

Tailored approaches are essential, considering the diverse needs and challenges faced by this population when accessing and understanding health information [5].

Higher health literacy is associated with better self-management and improved quality of life for patients with chronic kidney disease [6].

Let's break it down: understanding one's condition and treatment options significantly empowers patients, leading to better well-being [6].

Health literacy faces critical challenges and opportunities in an era rife with misinformation [7].

Digital literacy skills are increasingly vital for discerning credible health information

from false narratives [7].

Public health efforts must equip individuals with skills to critically evaluate information, fostering resilience against health-related disinformation [7].

Higher health literacy is associated with better adherence to healthy lifestyle changes and treatment regimens in adults with hypertension [8].

This work underscores the importance of patient education tailored to individuals' health literacy levels to effectively manage chronic conditions like hypertension [8].

Organizational health literacy involves frameworks, tools, and interventions that enable health organizations to be more responsive to the health literacy needs of their populations [9].

Improving health outcomes demands that healthcare providers and systems proactively address health literacy at an organizational level [9].

Digital health literacy also plays a significant role in fostering healthy lifestyles and preventing noncommunicable diseases [10].

Individuals with higher digital health literacy are better equipped to navigate online health resources, adopt preventive behaviors, and manage their health proactively [10].

What this really means is investing in digital health literacy education is essential for public health strategies [10].

Description

The importance of health literacy is a recurring theme across contemporary healthcare research, emphasizing its foundational role in empowering individuals to actively manage their health and make informed decisions [1]. This proactive approach to health management is crucial not only for personal well-being but also for the broader public good. What this really means is that healthcare professionals are tasked with the vital responsibility of adapting their communication methods. They must ensure that health information is presented in a manner that is both accessible and actionable for everyone, irrespective of their educational background or social status [1]. This tailored communication is key to overcoming barriers and fostering genuine understanding.

Expanding on this, the advent of digital platforms has introduced a new dimension: digital health literacy. This specific form of literacy is crucial, especially when considering its impact on chronic disease management, such as type 2 diabetes [2]. Studies reveal a significant correlation where enhanced digital health literacy directly translates into improved patient engagement with eHealth tools. This engagement, in turn, leads to more successful self-management strategies

for individuals navigating complex conditions [2]. Here's the thing: this highlights an urgent need for the development and widespread availability of accessible digital tools, coupled with targeted educational programs designed to bridge the digital divide that currently exists within healthcare systems. Such efforts are vital to ensure equitable access to health resources and information [2, 10]. Digital health literacy also extends to fostering healthy lifestyles and preventing noncommunicable diseases, as individuals with higher digital literacy are better equipped to navigate online health resources and adopt preventive behaviors [10].

Beyond direct health management, health literacy significantly shapes how patients interact with healthcare providers, particularly in shared decision-making processes [3]. Research consistently indicates that a higher level of health literacy positively influences a patient's capacity and willingness to participate meaningfully in discussions about their own care [3]. What this means is that cultivating health literacy empowers patients to transition from passive recipients of care to active, informed partners in the development and implementation of their treatment plans. This collaborative approach can lead to more personalized and effective care outcomes [3]. However, the absence of adequate health literacy presents serious challenges, particularly in medication adherence for chronic diseases. A meta-analysis clearly demonstrates a strong link between low health literacy and poor adherence to medication regimens [4]. Let's break it down: patients with limited health literacy often struggle to comprehend complex prescription instructions and treatment protocols, which frequently results in suboptimal health outcomes. Improving health literacy is therefore a crucial step in enhancing medication adherence and improving overall disease management [4].

The scope of health literacy also encompasses its impact on quality of life and resilience against misinformation. For patients with chronic conditions like kidney disease, higher health literacy is associated with better self-management and an improved quality of life [6]. Understanding one's condition and treatment options significantly empowers these patients, leading to better well-being [6]. In an age saturated with information, and often misinformation, digital literacy skills are paramount for individuals to critically discern credible health information from misleading narratives [7]. Public health efforts must focus on equipping individuals with these evaluative skills to build resilience against health-related disinformation [7]. Furthermore, health literacy influences self-management behaviors in conditions such as hypertension, with higher literacy linked to better adherence to healthy lifestyle changes and treatment regimens [8]. Tailored patient education is essential for managing these chronic conditions effectively [8].

Finally, the concept of organizational health literacy underscores that health systems themselves must adapt to effectively serve diverse patient populations [9]. This involves frameworks, tools, and interventions designed to make health organizations more responsive to the specific health literacy needs of their communities [9]. The growing recognition is that healthcare providers and systems must proactively address health literacy at an organizational level to genuinely improve health outcomes. This includes developing tailored interventions, such as educational programs, simplified communication, and digital tools, specifically for vulnerable groups like older adults, to ensure they can access and understand vital health information [5, 9]. Investing in health literacy across all levels—individual, digital, and organizational—is a collective imperative for robust public health strategies.

Conclusion

The body of research emphasizes the critical role of health literacy across various aspects of healthcare and public health. Fundamental health literacy empowers individuals to proactively manage their health, enabling informed decisions for improved health outcomes and the broader public good. This necessitates that healthcare professionals tailor communication to be accessible and actionable for

everyone, regardless of background. Specifically, higher health literacy is linked to better patient engagement in shared decision-making, allowing individuals to become active partners in their treatment plans. A significant concern is the association between low health literacy and poor medication adherence in patients with chronic diseases, as difficulty understanding prescriptions often leads to suboptimal outcomes. Therefore, improving health literacy is crucial for enhancing both medication adherence and overall disease management. Digital health literacy emerges as another vital component, particularly in effective diabetes management and in promoting healthy lifestyles to prevent noncommunicable diseases. Enhanced digital literacy improves patient engagement with eHealth tools and equips individuals to navigate online health resources and adopt preventive behaviors. The digital divide in healthcare demands accessible digital tools and targeted education. Furthermore, health literacy profoundly impacts the quality of life for those with chronic conditions like kidney disease, where understanding treatment options empowers better self-management. In an age of widespread misinformation, digital literacy skills are increasingly essential for discerning credible health information. Public health efforts must equip individuals to critically evaluate information, fostering resilience against disinformation. Finally, organizational health literacy, where health systems adapt to diverse patient needs, is seen as crucial for improving health outcomes at a systemic level, making tailored interventions for groups like older adults particularly important through educational programs and simplified communication.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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How to cite this article: Harrington, Emily. "Health Literacy: Crucial for Better Outcomes." *J Nurs Care* 14 (2025):716.

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Received: 03-Aug-2025, Manuscript No. jnc-25-173943; **Editor assigned:** 05-Aug-2025, PreQC No. P-173943; **Reviewed:** 19-Aug-2025, QC No. Q-173943; **Revised:** 25-Aug-2025, Manuscript No. R-173943; **Published:** 30-Aug-2025, DOI: 10.37421/2167-1168.2025.14.716
