



Opinion

Volume 13 Issue 4 - March 2024
DOI: 10.19080/AJPN.2024.13.555926

Acad J Ped Neonatol

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Brito Sílvia

In the Paths of Health Literacy

Pinto Deolinda¹ and Brito Sílvia^{2*}

¹Nurse; North Alentejo Local Health Unit, Portugal

²Social Science Departmental Unit, Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Portugal

Submission: February 12, 2024; **Published:** March 11, 2024

***Corresponding author:** Brito Sílvia, Social Science Department Unit, Polytechnic Institute of Tomar, Portugal

Keywords: Health Literacy; Personal Care

Opinion

Health is one of the fundamental pillars of human well-being, and the ability to comprehend and make informed decisions about health matters is essential for a full and healthy life. However, in an increasingly complex world where health information is abundant and often confusing, health literacy emerges as a crucial skill to navigate the nuances of the healthcare system and make conscious decisions about personal care. Considering individuals' competencies in managing their own health, health promotion, based on the idea of involving all people and sectors of society, ensures that individuals have a place of authorship [1]. The motivation to take responsibility for one's own health impacts the construct of health literacy, which anchors various concepts.

Health Literacy is defined as the set of cognitive and social skills that determine individuals' motivation and capacity to obtain, comprehend, evaluate, and apply information in order to make judgments and decisions in everyday life regarding healthcare, disease prevention, and health promotion [2]. Health literacy goes beyond the ability to read and understand clinical information; it also involves the ability to critically assess this information, apply it to one's own circumstances, and make informed decisions related to health. Unfortunately, studies show that many people face significant difficulties in this aspect, which can result in adverse consequences for their health and well-being [2].

One of the main challenges in promoting health literacy is the disparity in access to information and comprehension ability. Factors such as education, language, culture, and access to healthcare services play a crucial role in this scenario [3]. Therefore, it is imperative that efforts be directed toward making medical information more accessible and understandable for everyone, regardless of their background or socioeconomic context.

Contact with healthcare professionals is a privileged means of gathering health information. However, beyond interacting with professionals, it is necessary to ascertain whether patients have understood all the instructions provided to them for their subsequent rehabilitation [4]. In other words, improving communication with healthcare professionals is also a means that can help enhance health literacy [5].

Healthcare professionals increasingly serve as mediators in the processes of disease/health between patients and healthcare units, requiring a set of personal competencies [6] that span areas such as psychology, sociology, management, communication, and others [7]. The communication of healthcare professionals has proven crucial in the holistic view of the individual, facilitating access to information available digitally and/or in paper format. However, while important, it is not sufficient for citizens to comprehend the information and make decisions based on it. These assumptions of understanding, accessing, and navigating the healthcare system incorporate the concept of health literacy.

Communication is based on four essential functions, according to Bilhim [8]: Behavior Control; Communication influences behaviors; Motivation: It motivates people to understand what needs to be done; Affiliation: It addresses the need for connection and affiliation; Information Provision: Communication supplies the necessary information for decision-making [8]. Based on these assumptions, communicating information does not necessarily imply active citizen participation in decision-making. It's essential to consider Lasswell's paradigm: "who says what; through which channel; to whom; with what purpose." In other words, successful communication holds the key. In the context of health, the communication process involves relationships among the healthcare team, families, healthcare service users, and the community.

This perspective between professionals, patients, and families urgently requires health literacy training to empower them and ensure their effective participation in health promotion, prevention, and rehabilitation. The ability to communicate is fundamental in any relationship, with even greater significance in the context of health. Healthcare professionals consider communication their greatest asset for mobilizing and sharing concepts, aiming to empower patients and families in making decisions about their health. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that the quality of communication between healthcare professionals and patients is one of the key explanatory variables in the health-disease process, recovery, and health optimization [9]. Additionally, Wittenberg-Lyles et al. [10] highlighted that effective communication leads to patient satisfaction and adherence to healthcare, particularly when tailored to individual cognitive abilities, cultural background, education, and health beliefs [10].

Given the premise that communication is inevitable, all participants in the process must recognize its consequences. In other words, communication is a tool that influences the behaviour of those involved. Within the healthcare system, communication increasingly serves as a therapeutic technique—a clinical skill that establishes essential relationships and can benefit all parties involved. Therefore, prioritizing the development of advanced communication skills should be a focus for healthcare professionals [11]. By doing so, we minimize the risk of having healthcare professionals who apply their knowledge and technical competence to patients but fail to ensure effective understanding. This, in turn, contributes to greater health risks and reduced health promotion and self-care [7].

Ultimately, promoting health literacy is not merely about conveying information to patients; it's about empowering them to understand, question, and actively participate in their own healthcare. Healthcare professionals play a crucial role in this process, serving not only as knowledge providers but also as facilitators of patient empowerment. By adopting a patient-centered approach, healthcare professionals recognize that everyone is unique, with their own needs, values, and capacities. This perspective encourages open and collaborative communication, where the patient is viewed as an equal partner in defining strategies for managing their health and illness.

When patients feel empowered and engaged in their own care, they are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors, adhere to

treatment, and make informed choices. This not only improves clinical outcomes but also strengthens the relationship between patients and healthcare providers, fostering effective and long-term collaboration. Therefore, I urge every healthcare community to prioritize health literacy promotion and embrace practices that enhance understanding, learning, and active patient participation. Only through this holistic and empowering approach can we achieve true transformation in healthcare, where patients and professionals walk together toward a healthier and fuller life.

References

1. Saboga-Nunes L (2018) Promotion of literacy in health contexts. I Health Literacy seminar. Esposende.
2. Sørensen K, Van den Broucke S, Fullam J, Doyle G, Pelikan J, et al. (2012) Health literacy and public health: A systematic review and integration of definitions and models. *BMC Public Health*.
3. Hu D, Zhou S, Crowley-McHattan ZJ, Liu Z (2021) Factors that influence participatory activity in school-aged children and adolescents: a systematic review from the social ecological model perspective. *International journal of environmental research and public health* 18(6): 3147.
4. Antunes MD (2004) Health literacy: investment in health promotion and cost rationalization. *Health Libraries: What Future? Minutes of the XI Jornadas APDIS*, pp. 123-133.
5. Nielsen-Bohlman L, Panzer A, Kindig D (2004) *Health Literacy: A prescription to end confusion*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences.
6. Tench R, Konczos M (2013) *Mapping European communication practitioners' competencies*. London: ECOPSI.
7. Vaz de Almeida C (2019) ACP health communication model: Communication skills at the heart of transversal, holistic and practical health literacy. In C. (. Almeida, *Health literacy in practice*). Lisbon: Edições ISPA, pp. 43-52.
8. Bilhim J (2011) *Current issues in Strategic Human Resources Management*. Lisbon: Lisbon: Higher Institute of Social and Political Sciences.
9. Lamela D, Bastos A (2012) Communication between health professionals and the elderly: a review of the research. *Psychology & Society*, pp. 684-690.
10. Wittenberg-Lyles E, Goldsmith J, Richardson B, Hallett J, Clark R (2013) The practical nurse: a case for Comfort communication training. *Am J Hospital Palliat care* 30(2): 162-166.
11. Chichirez CM, Purcărea VL (2018) Interpersonal communication in healthcare. *Journal of medicine and life* 11(2):119-122.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/AJPN.2024.13.555926](https://doi.org/10.19080/AJPN.2024.13.555926)

**Your next submission with Juniper Publishers
will reach you the below assets**

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission

<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>