

Importance of Health Literacy in India

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Abstract—Health Literacy has been defined as the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health. Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. Although health literacy is a problem worldwide, it needs to be addressed urgently in India. Ours is the second-most populated country in the world, with a population of 1.2 billion, only slightly behind China. Health Literacy means more than being able to read pamphlets and successfully make appointments. By improving people's access to health information and their capacity to use it effectively, health literacy is critical to empowerment. Lack of health literacy poses a great threat to our nation's economic stability as health care expenditures are on the rise, along with an expanding population. As a result of overpopulation, access to quality health care and reliable health information can be difficult to come by. India also has an unusually high rate of illiteracy and poverty in both urban and rural areas, both of which contribute to low rates of health literacy. Today, low health literacy is a threat to the health and well-being of Indian healthcare system. Low health literacy reduces the success of treatment and increases the risk of medical error. Health literacy is essential to promote healthy individuals and communities. A health-literate India would be a richer and more productive country and if we want to become a developed country, this is one of the first hurdles we need to cross.

Keywords: Health Literacy, health care, medical facility.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Health literacy is a term not widely understood by the general population. It is defined as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions and services needed to prevent or treat illness". Taking care of ourselves is an important part of life. But more than that, we should be able to prevent, manage and understand any health problems that arise. This is called health literacy. A person's level of health literacy is based on their age, education level, socioeconomic standing, and cultural background. Patients with low health literacy have a more difficult time navigating the health care system. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this group of patients may find it harder to find medical services and health care providers, fill out health forms, provide their complete medical history with their providers, seek

preventative care, understand the health risks associated with some behaviors, taking care of chronic health conditions, and understanding how to take prescribed medications (About health literacy, 2014). It is to a certain extent the patient's responsibility to increase their own health literacy knowledge. The Health literacy is much more than being able to read. The National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) wrote that it requires several skills: reading and listening, as well as analytical and decision-making, then the ability to apply these skills together when it comes to health situation. The unequal status of women in Indian society also leads to a lack of health literacy. If women are not empowered and educated to take care of their family's health and make the right medical decisions, it is far more likely that greater rates of illness will result.

Health Literacy promotes empowerment, which in turn is vital for achieving the internationally agreed health and development goals as well as the emerging threats such as from the pandemic influenza, climate change and non-communicable diseases.

In addition to basic literacy skills, health literacy requires knowledge of health topics. People with limited health literacy often lack knowledge or have misinformation about the body as well as the nature and causes of disease. Without this knowledge, they may not understand the relationship between lifestyle factors such as diet and exercise and various health outcomes. Health information can overwhelm even persons with advanced literacy skills. Medical science progresses rapidly. What people may have learned about health or biology during their school years often becomes outdated or forgotten, or it is incomplete. Moreover, health information provided in a stressful or unfamiliar situation is unlikely to be retained.

2. MOST AFFECTED SEGMENT:

Low health literacy affects everyone, but as the National Academies wrote, the chronically ill and elderly are most at risk. They also have the highest health care needs and expenses. Populations most likely to experience low health literacy are older adults, racial and ethnic minorities, people with less than a high school degree or GED certificate, people with low income levels, non-native speakers of English, and