



Health Literacy: What does it have to do with cultural competency?

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Overview

Health literacy is an important aspect of culturally competent healthcare. How consumers and patients understand and use health information is directly tied to their cultural attitudes and beliefs. The culturally competent healthcare professional must not only respect consumers and patients' culture and beliefs, but also their ability to understand health information and put it to use in their daily lives. How they are able to understand is influenced by the extent to which health systems and professionals impose barriers. Health professionals who incorporate health literacy principles into their practices, programs and policies are more likely to reduce health disparities and increase positive health outcomes.



Key Policy Drivers

- ❖ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964)
- ❖ HHS Task Force Report on Black and Minority Health (1985)
- ❖ Healthy People 2010 and 2020
- ❖ HHS Office of Minority Health's National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (2000)
- ❖ Association of American Medical Colleges' Tool for Assessing Cultural Competence Training (2003)
- ❖ Office for Civil Rights' Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients (2003)
- ❖ Liaison Committee on Medical Education's Accreditation Standards (2007)
- ❖ Society of General Internal Medicine's Health Disparities Task Force Recommendations (2007)
- ❖ Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act (2010)
- ❖ National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (2010)

Common Research Questions

1. Under what conditions can and will providers remove barriers by modifying their communication content and methods?
2. Which best practices produce improved health outcomes?
3. What factors help and hinder understanding and use of health information resulting in improved health?
4. What is the impact of cultural competency training on patient outcomes and health disparities?



Commonly Used Definitions

- **Health Literacy** is the ability to obtain, process, and understand health information needed to make informed health decisions [IOM 2004].
- **Cultural Competency** is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations [Office of Minority Health, 2005].

Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy

The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy was established at the University of Maryland School of Public Health in Fall 2007 as the nation's first academic health literacy center. The Center's mission is to strengthen capacity of the public health workforce to both know and apply health literacy principles in their practices. Its work focuses on current and emerging public health professional education, outreach and accompanying research on health literacy and health outcomes.

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UMCP-SPH Online Resources

http://sph.umd.edu/epib/cultural_competency/Health_Literacy.html