

Understanding Health Information: Older Adults' Perspective



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Abstract

Research has shown that limited health literacy is a common concern for persons aged 65 years and older. Health care providers are unaware that elderly patients often have difficulty understanding and following the directions given to them during a medical office visit. Little is known about the methods elderly patients actually use to help understand health related teaching by their health care providers.

Objectives

- Explore the understanding of health information provided by Nurse Practitioners and Physicians to elderly residents in both rural and urban areas
- To identify perceived facilitators and barriers of health information understanding
- Identify mean literacy levels between elderly residents of urban and rural areas

Methods

Qualitative Descriptive Design

- Sample: 29 participants were recruited. Criteria for inclusion: ≥ 60 years of age, living independently, and ability to understand English.
- 3 Focus groups with a total of 29 participants were conducted using four open ended questions.
- Newest Vital Sign – health literacy level
- Recordings were audio taped and transcribed. Thematic analysis was completed by researchers.

Implications for Clinical Practice



- Effective interpersonal communication
- Being accessible
- Use of written instructions most helpful
- Use other resources (pharmacists, significant others) for reinforcement

Results

Themes

- Overall poor understanding of health information
- Frustration with both providers and health care systems
- Written instructions most helpful
- Health Literacy Results:

Examples

- “Sometimes they don't go into detail enough”
“I don't know what they are saying”
- “Nobody explains really what is going on”
“He doesn't even talk to me, he is looking at the computer”
“You can't even talk to a real person, they always have the message machine on”
- “The pharmacist gives good written information on all my meds”
“I write the information on my calendar”
“Print out sheets with all instructions with large print are what I need”
- Urban group 4.56
Rural Group 2.57
(< 3 indicates limited literacy)