

Bridging the Gap in Patient and Family Education for Older Adult Patients in a Primary Care Setting

Betty Perez-Rivera, MS, EdD, MCHES



BACKGROUND

Health Literacy proficiency in the United States is extremely low. Only 12% of adults in the U.S. are proficient in understanding and using health information to make informed decisions. Older adults are disproportionately affected. Approximately 97% of adults 65 years or older have difficulty understanding health information. Cognitive, learning, and physical barriers increase challenges, leading to poor health outcomes and increased mortality. The National Academy for the Aging Society estimates unnecessary expenditures of \$73 billion attributable to low health literacy. Increasing patient health literacy must also focus on providing specialized, comprehensive trainings for clinicians, health administrators, and healthcare employees in order to ensure best practice guidelines for communicating with older adults and their families. It is important to note that the 12% proficiency rate includes healthcare professionals and diverse individuals from every ethnic, socio-economic and educational background.

GOALS

- 1) Gain a better understanding of current educational approaches and resources available to address patient education needs within a primary care setting. This tailored training focused on the specific needs of older adults.
- 2) Educate clinicians and other healthcare professionals on health literacy practices to enhance their patient/family and provider communication to aid in improving health outcomes.
- 3) Develop best-practice strategies, policies, and procedures to ensure full integration of patient education into the patient care plan.



Pre – and Post-Knowledge Tests provided for healthcare professionals during their specialization training in geriatrics to ascertain their health literacy and determine what strengths and weaknesses could be present that could pose a barrier to good patient/family and provider communication.

Health literacy principles, special considerations for geriatric patients, and general teaching strategies were included. Collaborative efforts and communication chains were discussed in comprehensive health literacy training. Interactive activities, lecture, and individual assignments were part of the training session.

Topics included in Professional Health Literacy Training to work with Older Adults:

Dementia and other mental health issues; social issues such as isolation and helplessness; as well as physical and neurological impairment issues to be considered as barriers to understanding health information. Comprehensive assessments are being conducted to explore current strategies, strengths, and barriers in patient education.

METHODS

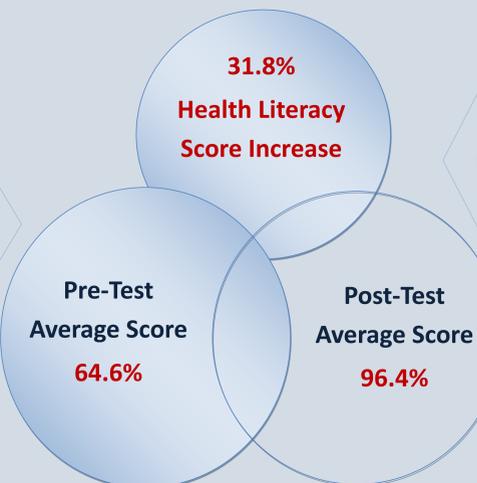


Professional Health Literacy Training

Twenty (20) participants completed health literacy training. These included geriatric nurses, a Nurse Practitioner, and health specialists providing direct patient care and education.

Bio-psycho-social indices and plain language styles of communication were covered throughout the training. Participants received a training manual as a resource to take back to their units.

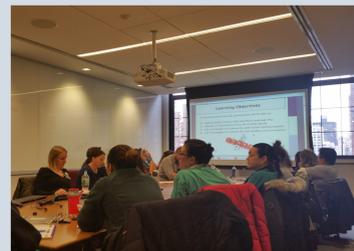
Impact



Next Steps

As an Institution-wide collaboration, Next Steps include:

- Additional comprehensive health literacy trainings tailored for each patient group and establishing best practices for developing relationships, sharing health information, and providing services to meet their needs.
- Inter-disciplinary strategic planning to integrate patient education into everyday healthcare practices.
- Updates to existing health literacy policies and procedures to ensure full implementation.



Contact: Dr. Betty Perez-Rivera— bp.rivera@ieccd.org

RESULTS, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS