

Health Literacy - definitions

Health literacy can be considered as a “domain” of literacy. Health literacy is commonly defined as *‘the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions’* (1, 2).

Broader definitions encompass a wider range of cognitive and social skills which enable people to feel empowered to take control and improve their health (3, 4). According to Nutbeam (5, 6), health literacy comprises three levels:

1. Functional Health Literacy – basic reading comprehension and writing skills to understand health information/messages, together with knowledge of health conditions, services, and systems.
2. Interactive Health Literacy – higher-level communicative and social skills required to extract and discuss information with others.
3. Critical Health Literacy Skills – advanced literacy, cognitive, and social skills to analyze information and make informed decisions.

Health literacy is both context- and content-specific; different health care contexts require specific content knowledge and skills (6). This means that even those with higher literacy skills may have difficulties in novel health care environments (6).

References

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