

Do We Need to Shift Our Focus to Health Literacy?

Aksha Sujatha Shetty*

Lecturer of Optometry, Goa Medical College, Bambolim, Goa, India

***Corresponding Author:** Aksha Sujatha Shetty, Lecturer of Optometry, Goa Medical College, Bambolim, Goa, India.

Received: April 23, 2021

Published: May 01, 2021

ISSN: 2582-3191

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Literacy means ability of a person to read, write and comprehend. Health literacy is the capability of an individual to obtain, process, understand basic health related information and be able to communicate this information or make health related decisions [1]. It is a very important skill that helps individuals to take part in discussions and understand health policies. This covers a range of skills such as reading prescription, ability to perform first aid or measure dose of medicine to name few. It enables the individual to be more aware about their conditions which in return leads to increase in compliance. Arcane languages that Medical and allied health professionals use is difficult for many individuals to understand. Sometimes, due to fear of being judged and misunderstood for not understanding they hide away their doubts and start blindly following instructions.

Health literacy of an individual varies based on their education, culture, language, health settings and health context [2]. Health context are materials and sources that help provide information regarding health to an individual. It could be Government bodies, Non-profit organisation, Media, journals etc. With increasing access to internet, media and online search engines play a very important role in creating health awareness. Social media platforms play a very crucial part in the life of any individual in this day and time. It is of great importance that correct and verified information is displayed. Lack of health literacy and false information can only trigger rise in myths and misconceptions which can be counterpro-

ductive. Social and Educational backgrounds play an equal role in both creating and implementing health literacy. Society shapes our ideologies and attitude towards health. Indian society is a mixture of different native languages, socioeconomic backgrounds, religion etc. Difference in the cultural background of the individual and the maker of the information leads to decrease in the understanding. It is important that information related to health is made available according to the cultural setting of an individual thus making it more acceptable.

Complex health system and lack of proper health care services in India makes it very difficult for individuals to get adequate health care. Even though there are many different government policies available, lack of people knowledge, complexity while availing these finances, inability to connect with right organisation can lead to these policies and funding be futile. Health insurance in India provides little benefit with majority of population unaware about how to register or get benefits at right time. Constant awareness regarding different health care benefits must be created and knowledge about how to obtain insurance and where to apply for funding must be explained. The complexity of this system must be reduced.

Education shapes humans. This statement proves the power of education in an individual's life, making it one of the most powerful way in which one can implement health literacy. It should be used as a stepping stone to create awareness and promote healthy living.

Basic life saving skills and information related to availing of health care services should be included in the syllabus and introduced to individuals when they are young. Absence of health and sex education is one of the major drawback in Indian education system. Providing such knowledge can help them understand more about refractive error and different eye conditions and prevent unintentional injuries, violence, drug and tobacco use. There are many barriers that stop the provision of health education at school level. Some being, lack of collaboration between health agencies and schools, lack of support towards controversial subjects (HIV, AIDS and STDs), Lack of accurate knowledge amongst the educational and health leader etc [3].

There are different ways in which we can provide health care. Health care providers should make it a point that they clearly explain patients and caregivers about the condition in layman's language. They should be re-educated in every visit. Usage of medical tools, eye drops, dosage of medicine should be explained. Medical professionals must create a comfortable environment so that patients are free to ask questions and clear any doubts. It is essential to make health care related materials and information available for every individual in local languages. Individuals should be constantly made aware about major health related conditions.

In this period of pandemic, there has been a lot of awareness generated around health and sanitation. It has also given rise to lot of panic and misguidance purely due to lack of health literacy among individuals. With many health related policy coming into place, it will only create maximum impact when everyone is health literate.

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