

Patient Engagement and Health Literacy: An Indigenous Cultural Context

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Patient Engagement'*

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Key messages

- Patient engagement & health literacy: the connection
- **Health literacy for Indigenous populations: personal agency, self-determining health**



Patient Engagement

“Engaged patients take a more active role in maintaining their health and are often more satisfied with their care and have positive feelings of overall health.” (Health Council of Canada, 2011)



Patient engagement

- Strategies to strengthen patient engagement are effective
- Patients can select treatments, manage long term conditions, increase safety of drug use & infection control
- Interventions can improve patients' knowledge & experience, use of health services, health behavior and health status *(Coulter & Ellins, 2007)*



Health Council of Canada

- “...more can be done to improve patient engagement across the health care system and in particular within primary care.”

(2010 Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey on the General Public's Views of their Health Care System, 2011)



DEFINITIONS

“The capacity of patients to discuss issues with their care provider, to generate options for treatment and management and to share in decision-making.”

“The goal for the healthcare provider and patient to work together to build a productive relationship.” *(Health Council of Canada, 2011)*



PATIENTS FLOURISH

- Involvement and respect = patients ‘do’ and feel better
- Assume a more confident and active role
- Are more satisfied with their care
- Are positive with their overall health
- Have an improved knowledge and understanding of their care



Patient engagement barrier: low health literacy

Health literacy = central to enhancing involvement of patients

‘Patients must be able to read and understand health information , in order to apply it to decisions about their own situation.’ (Coulter & Ellins)

Literacy is one of the major influences of health status. *(Health Canada in Korhonen, 2006)*

Serious consequences to inadequate health literacy.
(Weiss, 2005)



HEALTH LITERACY, EMPOWERMENT & ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITY

- HL = empowerment
- Low HL = poorer health status, more hospital admissions, less likely to adhere to treatment and self-care plans, have more drug & treatment errors and use preventative services less often
- HL = health equality



Indigenous populations.....

- Lower levels of education = poorer health
Aboriginal peoples in Canada in this group (*PHAC, 2008*)
- Current approaches: lacking in social context
- Require an Indigenized perspective/worldview



SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LITERACY/HEALTH LITERACY

- Socio-cultural factors contribute to an individual's ability to receive, manage and act on the health information they receive
- Indigenous people: Severe poverty and unemployment, sub-standard housing , lower level of education
- Indigenized concepts of literacy = socio-cultural and historical-political factors
 - Colonization
 - Residential schooling
- Oppressive and dis-empowering impact on Indigenous people and negatively impacted their sense of personal agency with respect to learning.



MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO: DOMINANT MODELS OF LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

- Cognitive or deficit model
- ‘Autonomous’ model
- Disguises cultural and ideological assumptions
- Simply imposing western conceptions of literacy onto other cultures (*Street, 2005*)



CULTURALLY RELEVANT APPROACHES

- **Cultural competence** can be seen as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.” . *(NAHO, 2009)*
- **Cultural safety** analyzes power imbalances, institutional discrimination, colonization, and colonial relationships as they apply to health care and health education. . *(NAHO, 2009)*



Indigenous people: cultural safety

- Cultural safety within a First Nations, Inuit and Métis context means the practitioner, whether Aboriginal or not, can communicate competently with a patient in that patient's social, political, linguistic, economic, and spiritual realm. *(NAHO, 2009)*



Indigenized approach: personal agency & relational space

- Support development of ‘personal agency’: congruent with Indigenized notions of empowerment
- Power = balance in relationships
- Relational space



Indigenized approach: self-determining

- Support right to self-determine their own health (and education)
- Requires control over one's life individually and collectively (*Fontaine in Frideres & Gadacz, 2008*)
- Will increase the potential for improved health literacy



Indigenized Approach: (w)holism

- Agentic capability also tied to an Indigenous worldview
- Addresses the whole person including the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual realms
- Language and traditional teaching are an important consideration: create continuity between one's inner life and one's capacity for action (*Youngblood-Henderson, 2000*)



Indigenized approach: culturally relevant evaluation

- Multiple Indigenous definitions of literacy
- Culturally relevant indicators are needed (*Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006*)



The way forward

- acknowledgement and integration of culturally congruent socio-political contexts.
- decolonize educational approaches for Indigenous peoples and thus improve the potential for health literacy.

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