

Handling health literacy: a gain and a loss

A review and interviews with experts

In health communication health literacy (HL) may contribute to theory building, but in health practice the added value of the concept HL is questionable.

Perspectives HL theory

- Insights in cultural and social aspects of health
- Exploration of citizen's and patient's views, attitudes and behaviour
- Suggestions of innovations in health care

Unmanageable for practice

- Various ideas on content and meaning
- Various dimensions, domains and levels
- Difficult to make operational and measurable

Relevance

HL theory



HL practice



Compensating or correcting

- Correct and change behaviour or improve health outcomes
- Compensate by adjusting to facilitate behaviour
- Depending on stable health outcome/trait or variable skill/state

Masking aggregate

- Is HL just a marker for SES, self-efficacy etc?
- Is HL just an aggregation of skills, self-efficacy and health competencies?

Background

- Content and meaning range from strictly functional (comprehensive reading) to multidimensional (comprehensive, interactive and critical skills)
- Depending on communication level and media
- Health beliefs, culture and society provide a lens through which individuals perceive and act on health information
- Low HL skills exist in all levels of society (not by definition related to low education level)
- Associated with bad health and serious social, economical and cultural consequences

