

A Review of Health Literacy and Diabetes: Opportunities for Technology

Suzanne Austin Boren, Ph.D., M.H.A.^{1,2,3}

Abstract

Background:

The objective of this study was to assess the published literature on health literacy and diabetes, as well as identify opportunities for technology to strengthen information skills and modify behavior to improve diabetes health outcomes.

Methods:

Medline (1990–2008), the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (1990–2008), and the Education Resources Information Center (1990–2008) were searched, and reference lists from included articles were reviewed to identify additional studies. Articles were included that presented measures of literacy or numeracy specific to diabetes, examined associations between health literacy and diabetes outcomes, or tested a health literacy intervention among persons with diabetes.

Results:

Twenty-four articles were included in this review. Five articles reported on measures of literacy or numeracy specific to diabetes. Thirteen of the fifteen cross-sectional studies (87%) associated limited health literacy with poorer diabetes outcomes. Two of the four (50%) health literacy intervention studies lead to improved health outcomes.

Conclusions:

The cross-sectional studies provide evidence of an association between health literacy and diabetes outcomes; however, there is a need to design and test strategies to improve diabetes health outcomes that consider health literacy. Information and communication technology opportunities could help to mediate the effect that limited health literacy has on diabetes-related health outcomes.

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Author Affiliations: ¹Health Services Research and Development, Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, Columbia, Missouri; ²Department of Health Management and Informatics, School of Medicine, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri; and ³Center for Health Care Quality, School of Medicine, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri

Abbreviations: (CINAHL) Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, (DHBM) diabetes health belief model, (DNT) diabetes numeracy test, (ERIC) Education Resources Information Center, (HbA1c) hemoglobin A1c, (NART) national adult reading test, (REALM) rapid estimate of adult literacy in medicine, (RSPM) Raven's standard progressive metric, (S-TOFHLA) short-form test of functional health literacy in adults, (TOFHLA) test of functional health literacy in adults, (WRAT3) wide range achievement test, third edition

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Corresponding Author: Suzanne Austin Boren, Ph.D., M.H.A., Health Services Research and Development, Harry S. Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, 800 Hospital Drive, Columbia, MO 65201; email address borens@health.missouri.edu