

Chinese diabetic patients' communicative health literacy: Views from health professionals

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Introduction: Communicative health literacy, the ability to extract health information and derive meaning through communications, has been a concern in the field of health promotion. Little is known about the communication between diabetic patients and health professionals in Chinese society. This study aims to portray how doctors and nurses view Chinese older adults' ability and barriers to retrieve health information in clinical settings.

Methods and materials: This qualitative study comprised of two focus groups (one for 6 nurses and the other for 5 doctors) which were performed in November/December 2008. Interviews were semi-structured and guiding questions were used to facilitate discussions. Each interview lasted for one and a half hour. All the interviews were carried out in Cantonese and audio-taped. The content was transcribed verbatim and then coded by two independent researchers.

Result: Doctors and nurses perceived that most of the diabetic patients were capable to obtain and understand essential health information through individual or group counseling. They welcomed patients to ask questions and agreed that interactive communication was crucial. However, external factors (such as time constraint, manpower issue, confusion due to massive information from the Internet) and personal factors (such as language, low literacy level, Chinese cultural belief and mood problems) may hinder individuals' ability to communicate better with health professionals. Different strategies (such as "teach back" technique, authoritative figures, pictures or models, rapport building) were used to enhance communication.

Conclusion: These findings encourage clinical practitioners to take a closer look to the issues and barriers in communicative health literacy. The current study is of significant importance to contribute to health literacy arena with Chinese culture and with information about people with diabetes mellitus.

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