

5. Developments in Health Literacy Assessment

Literacy Tests in the Doctor's Office

One tool for investigation of low health literacy that has originated in the health care community may not be as beneficial to adult literacy learners: health literacy testing in the doctor's office. Tests such as the Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults (TOFHLA) and the Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM) were initially developed to assess patient literacy for studies to measure the problem. However, the tests are now promoted as a means for health care personnel to identify patients with low literacy who come into a clinic for service. The administering personnel are not routinely trained in sensitivity for working with low-literacy adults. The benefit of getting a patient's test score is unclear. Being singled out to take a literacy test in a health care setting might cause a person with low literacy skills to feel heightened shame and anxiety (which, combined with feeling unwell in the first place, might cause the patient to do poorly on the test) and resist seeking future needed medical care.

The 2003 NAAL

In 2003 a new tool will be used to collect data on adult health literacy in the United States. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) will contain a new health literacy component which will assess skills in three health literacy domains: clinical activities, prevention activities, and navigating the health care system. The NAAL will be administered by trained interviewers to a representative sample of about 13,000 adults from across the country.

References

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