Abstract

Objective. All currently available definitions of health literacy may be considered quite general. Given the complex nature of the patient-pharmacy encounter and the varying tasks required to properly and successfully consume or administer medication or to adhere to a pharmaceutical care regimen, these available definitions may describe inadequately a patient's health literacy for the purpose of pharmacotherapy and pharmacist intervention. Therefore, the objective of this research was to conceptualize the Pharmacotherapy Literacy construct.

Methods. Licensed pharmacists (n=2,368) were mailed a questionnaire providing them with the Healthy People 2010 definition of health literacy and asked, "Given this definition, how would you define Pharmacotherapy Literacy?" A total of 420 usable surveys were returned of which 176 (42%) included responses to the open-ended question concerning pharmacotherapy literacy. Responses were reviewed independently and collectively by the authors. Common themes were identified, compared and discussed until consensus was reached. An initial definition was formulated and distributed to six doctoral-trained academicians and practicing pharmacists who were asked to offer their opinions of the definition as well as suggestions for its improvement. The definition was modified and subjected to further review from 15 additional doctoral-trained academicians and practicing pharmacists who provided feedback concerning its improvement.

Results. Based on the recommendations received from the academicians and pharmacists, the following, final definition was formulated by the authors, Pharmacotherapy Literacy. An individual's capacity to obtain, evaluate, calculate, and comprehend basic information about pharmacotherapy and pharmacy related services necessary to make appropriate medication related decisions, regardless of the mode of content delivery (e.g. written, oral, visual images and symbols).

Conclusions. As the ever-changing pharmacy environment continues to advance and become more complex in nature, a definition of health literacy specific to the pharmacy setting—thereby providing a name and a focus—may improve medication consumption, medication safety, and the patient-pharmacist relationship.

Keywords

Health Literacy, Drug Therapy, Medication Errors, Consensus.