

Review Article

Need of the hour, “health literacy”: the drug of choice for the current pandemic

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic by World health organization on 11 March 2020. The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are non-pharmacological methods. Therefore, prevention and supportive care are highly recommended so health literacy going to play an important role in preventing the diseases. It implies to the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions. Health literacy is still new and there is a paucity of published literature, there are few studies have demonstrated its effectiveness, many countries with good literacy have got good success in controlling this pandemic, for example Kerala in India. This demonstrated that education can support the weak and overburden health systems in successfully mitigating the effect of this global pandemic where the treatments and vaccines for it are in the development phase.

Keywords: COVID 19, Education, Health literacy, Non pharmacological, Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of SARS CoV-2 (COVID-19) was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan city, China.¹ The World health organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 emergency to be the sixth public health emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020.² According to the report on 12th May 2020 the total number of people diagnosed with COVID-19 was 4006257 cases with 278892 deaths in 170 countries/regions; among these, 62 939 confirmed cases and 2109 deaths have been reported in India.^{3,4} COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic by WHO on 11 March 2020.⁵ As no effective treatment has been found and preventive measures remain the key for its control. In the current situation, well-informed individual and his behaviour is a key intervention alongside medical and governmental action. Nguyen et al in a study in Vietnam,

People with suspected COVID-19 symptoms were more likely depressed and had a lower health-related quality of life it found an increase in health literacy scores resulted in a 5% lower depression likelihood and an increase in 0.45 higher HRQoL-score was noted.⁶ As done in Indian State Kerala and Morocco, it is well known that the health literacy of these places are comparatively high. Responses by this health literate community played a vital role in making this country and state role model for controlling the cases of COVID-19.⁷ Most importantly its enthralling benefit is it takes a part to protect the mental health and health-related quality of life of people suffering from SARS COVID-19 during the pandemic.⁸ Health literacy is vital to slowing down the spread of the virus and mitigating the impact and effects. The various forms of health literacy and its appropriate application can do wonders for which whole humanity is looking for. It is going to be very effective drug for the ongoing

pandemic and is having capability to act as preventive medicine for upcoming ones. There is paucity of published literature in this field so during this high time of infectious disease like COVID-19. The most avoided term in this context is “literacy” especially when it comes in context of “Health literacy. This paper aims to highlight importance of health literacy and its role in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

ROLE OF HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy used to play a vital role in curbing the health discriminations resultant of better health and well-being especially among poor population. Adequate health literacy built a healthy-friendly environment, appropriate implementation of health policies, improved personal care, enhanced health outcomes and most importantly this all benefits come under an umbrella of lower expenditure.⁸ In recent years, health literacy has gained important attention owing to its close relationship with the social determinants of health. Health outcomes and use of health services with low health literacy are related to poor health outcomes, ensuing poor adherence to intake of medication, restricted understanding of health-related directions for self-management.⁹ The World Health Organization Commission on the social determinants of health identified literacy as having a “central role” in deciding inequities in health in poor and middle-income country.¹⁰

A health literate society is one with a population that can bear in mind the severity of the case and is prepared to grasp the way to defend themselves, and others, through basic actions. Inside the case of this new virus, which incorporates physical distancing and hand hygiene. It's to boots a society inside that the systems and services in situ can guarantee clear, timely, and needed communication.

Concept of health literacy

“Health literacy implies the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills, and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions. Thus, health literacy means more than being able to read pamphlets and make appointments. By improving people's access to health information, and their capacity to use it effectively, health literacy is critical to empowerment.¹¹

Health literacy information must be perceivable and it should meet the literacy needs of the people it's directed at. It consists of three well-defined domains: 1) Functional literacy 2) Interactive literacy and 3) Critical literacy.¹² Each is having its respective and significant function in promoting health by educating people about the basics of health care. Functional literacy is broadly based on task- a basic text and writes a simple statement. Skill-based mainly focuses on knowledge and skill on performing these tasks.¹² Interactive literacy describes

more advanced cognitive and literacy skills which, together with social skills, can be used to successfully interact with society and the economy to extract a range of information from a variety of sources.¹² Critical literacy comprises cognitive skills and social skills, can be applied to critically analyse figures, associate with society, and adequate use of this knowledge to rule over the situational events and crises of life.¹²

COVID-19 infodemic has lit up the absence of wellbeing proficiency. Irrelevant competencies to take care of their health and creating a storm of fake probabilities among the population which increases the risk of other morbidities.¹³ In a couple of studies that have inspected relationship between proficiency, training, and wellbeing results including mortality, education has been the more prevailing indicator of results than long stretches of instruction, with some proposing proficiency to assume an intervening job to the instruction wellbeing relationship.¹⁴

Indian state like Kerala has achieved great victory in this COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Kerala is considered as an early model of sustainable development because of improvement in the quality of life, ecological steadiness, social and economic equality and the decrease in political difficulty. It has achieved a positive sex ratio with 1084 females for 1000 males, which are much higher than the national average and the educational sector has shown a positive growth trend (93% literacy as per 2011). In Global scenario, among the developed nations also the countries which are high in literacy rate are showing commendable work regarding this dreadful pandemic. Health literacy has a major role in success stories of Countries like New Zealand, Germany and Finland. Some of the observational studies have cross-examined the relation between literacy, education and health outcomes including mortality, literacy has been proved to be more dominating forecaster of outcomes than surplus education, with some mediating role to education-health relationship. The need for health literacy skills and considerations across all these levels of influence grows increasingly acute. The importance of cross-sector and cross-national health literacy conversations in this time of international crises are clear, as both the disease and the evidence needed for solutions have rapidly crossed global borders. Despite the fact that wellbeing education is an issue around the world, it should be tended to desperately in India. Our own is the second-most populated nation on the planet. The absence of wellbeing proficiency represents an incredible danger to our country's monetary solidness as human services uses are on the ascent, alongside a growing populace. Because of overpopulation, access to quality human services and dependable wellbeing data can be hard to get a hold of. India has an abnormally high pace of lack of education and destitution in both urban and country territories, the two of which add to low paces of wellbeing proficiency. It appears to be incredibly difficult to execute the possibility of wellbeing education in Indian scenario

because of the featured focuses like: illiteracy, poverty, inequality/segregation/customary culture and the most significant factor is profound doubt of the overall clinical framework.

Way forward

Health literacy work setting should implement at the National Policy makers level to the community level with involvement of the stakeholders. Potential factors determining the HL among individuals are education, intelligence, Family health, habits, financial resources which influence the behaviour of people. Organization factors includes availability and accessibility of information and resources with environmental supports system. It is suggested that people should enhance their life-long learning behaviours (e.g., watching health-related television programs, reading official websites) to improve individual health literacy.⁸ Health literacy can be improved through the information, effective communication and structured education. It can be regarded as a measurable outcome of health education or patient education. Improvement in health literacy can be assessed through the measurement of changes to the knowledge and skills that will enable us in well informed and more autonomous health decision making.

Criteria health authorities must keep in mind

Explain the circumstance straightforwardly and explain the abrogating goals over and again to get ready individuals for the way that intercessions and suggestions may change dependent on new proof and adjust to future situations.

Be versatile: data suppliers must have the option to ceaselessly impart new proof and data. Specialists ought not to be hesitant to address prior messages and explanations if new data is accessible, particularly on the off chance that it is negating yesterday's news.

Avoid habitual pettiness: accusing bogus security guarantees and shameful over-translations of studies and figures are of little assistance. Or maybe, the point ought to be to reinforce the very much educated obligation regarding the individual, solidarity with especially helpless populace gatherings and focused on community oriented activity.

Linked to this is the need to get ready individuals for a torrent of deception. Wellbeing proficiency can apply some essential rules that guarantee individuals get the correct data, and expertise to separate the awful.

This will: Help individuals cross check the exactness and validity of data found on TV, radio, web, and web based life, including forceful advertisements for items; enable individuals to pose inquiries to relatives and confided in wellbeing experts about the phony news, deception and destructive substance and messages; guide individuals to

evidenced-based informing; encourage individuals to look through a subsequent source confirming the data and to two-fold check with family, companions, associates and confided in wellbeing experts.

CONCLUSION

There are potential edges of health literacy because it decreases the possibilities of high prevalence and exaggerated mortality by simply using the easy tool of support. In conjunction with system preparation, individual preparation is the final focus for determination advanced real-life issues. The necessity of the hour is to know the health literacy and its impact on the overall population and its edges in the individual level. However, taking social responsibility, thinking on the far side self-interest and understanding however people build a choices-aspects equivalent to moral points and activity insights- ought to think of among the toolbox of health literacy. First, globally, health literacy plays an important role for the interference of disease because it is in non-communicable diseases. All in all, it's a time to know the necessity of health literacy and it ought to be seen as social conscience with unanimous approach. The health literacy of individuals creating and supporting health call ability and temperament to have interaction with on the market atmosphere, info and support. During this pandemic, it's troublesome, nonetheless attainable, to require the time to boost health literacy as a result of immediate actions is needed by governments and citizens.

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