

Implications of Excluding Patient Self-Report Measures in a Study Assessing Health Literacy

Mõttus et al. (2014) assessed the relationship between physical health and health literacy (HL), which the Institute of Medicine (2004) defines as the “capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions” (as cited in Mõttus et al., 2014). The authors determined that lower levels of HL were associated with low physical fitness levels, greater body mass index, and less natural teeth. Thus, this study demonstrated that those who lack understandings of health may in fact have poor physical health.

The researchers of this study utilized several measures to assess patients’ health literacy, general cognitive ability, childhood cognitive ability, physical health, education, and occupational class. They did not, however, utilize self-report measures in the study which may have provided greater understandings of patients’ thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of health and health literacy to potentially improve the delivery of health care when developing interventions (Reeves et al., 2013).

Patients’ self reports would provide researchers with data to conduct thematic analyses to determine how patients learn about health, barriers that patients incur that may deter them from learning about health, and how they value health. These data could inform researchers about patients’ perceptions, and potentially allow them to develop interventions targeted at patients’ reported needs.

As a mental health clinician, I strive to help patients self-advocate and navigate systems successfully. However, there may be systemic barriers within medical care that prevent patients from living healthier lives. Due to the lack of self-report measures, these issues are not discussed in Mõttus and colleague’s (2014) study, which may inhibit health care professionals from

gaining an understanding of these barriers. Though the methodologies used in the study seem strong and provided important results, incorporating self-report measures may strengthen the overall utility of this research for policy makers, researchers, and clinicians.

Scott B. Greenspan, B.A.
Mental Health Counseling (M.S.) Student
Department of Counseling and School Psychology
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125
scott.greenspan001@umb.edu

References

- Möttus, R., Johnson, W., Murray, C., Wolf, M. S., Starr, J. M., & Deary, I. J. (2014). Towards understanding the links between health literacy and physical health. *Health Psychology*, 33(2), 164.
- Reeve, B. B., Wyrwich, K. W., Wu, A. W., Velikova, G., Terwee, C. B., Snyder, C. F., & ... Butt, Z. (2013). ISOQOL recommends minimum standards for patient-reported outcome measures used in patient-centered outcomes and comparative effectiveness research. *Quality Of Life Research: An International Journal Of Quality Of Life Aspects Of Treatment, Care & Rehabilitation*, 22(8), 1889-1905. doi:10.1007/s11136-012-0344-y