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HEALTH LITERACY AND ADHERENCE TO PSYCHIATRIC APPOINTMENTS: STUDY OF AN URBAN ACADEMIC CENTER

A. Bizamcer¹, K. MacIntyre²

¹Psychiatry, Temple University Medical School, ²Psychiatry, Temple University Hospital, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Introduction: Health literacy (HL) measures the ability of an individual to use health-related information in order to make appropriate health-related decisions and to navigate the healthcare system. It influences a variety of behaviors such as breastfeeding, medication adherence, or the use of screening tests. Research has shown that it is related to the treatment outcome of conditions such as HIV and diabetes.

Objective: It is the assumption of this study that health literacy also plays a role in psychiatric patients' adherence to treatment; in particular, to outpatient psychiatric appointments.

Aims: We hypothesized that patients with different health literacy levels would have different adherence rates to outpatient psychiatric appointments.

Methods: The study was conducted in 2006 in the Outpatient Psychiatry Department (OPD) of Temple University School of Medicine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. All English and Spanish-speaking patients of the OPD (potential N = 150) were invited to complete the short version of the Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults (sTOFHLA), yielding three HL groups: adequate, marginal and inadequate. We explored the demographic and clinical correlates of HL and compared the three literacy groups with respect to their adherence to appointments during a 12-month period.

Results: Our study showed that, for our patient population, HL was not significantly related to any of the demographic and clinical variables included in our analysis except appointment adherence.

Conclusion: Patients with lower HL had lower adherence to appointments. These findings invite further research to explore the significance of HL.