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How Effective Healthcare Communication Contributes to Health Equity

Effective healthcare communication policies and practices, including provider health literacy, contribute to improving the quality of services for culturally and linguistically diverse populations as well as people with limited health literacy skills.

An elderly woman and a nurse are discussing the woman's medications, speaking in Spanish.

Patient I take one of that and one of the other.

Nurse In the morning?

Patient In the morning.

Nurse Like this.

Patient Okay.

They continue to interact as the narrator's voice is heard.

Narrator Effective healthcare communication policies and practices, including provider health literacy, contribute to improving the quality of services for culturally and linguistically diverse populations, as well as people with limited health literacy skills.

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A view of HRSA's Headquarters is shown.

Narrator At HRSA, we view healthcare communication as a synergy of three factors: health literacy, cultural competency, and linguistic competency. It is important to emphasize a dynamic view of healthcare communication. These three factors interplay with each other in dynamic ways.

The patient and nurse from the initial scene are joined by another woman, a doctor, who continues to speak Spanish to the patient.

Patient What?

Doctor Yes

Patient This is a generic drug from Walgreen's.

Doctor Yes

They continue to interact as the narrator's voice is heard.

Narrator For example, a person's health literacy may be influenced by socio-cultural factors including education, income, country of origin, level of assimilation to the host culture, to name a few.

As the narrator discusses them, a swirling display of terms mentioned in the next paragraph appear on a black background.

Cultural factors not only include language, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but also physical and mental capacity, age, religion, housing status, and regional differences.

A series of clips of people of different ethnicities and situations is presented.

Culture also includes diversity within specific cultural and ethnic groups, even the culture of western medicine.

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An animated diagram showing the intersection of Race & ethnicity, Environment, Language, and Social Class with Culture is shown.

All of the factors that I have mentioned are very dynamic and highly interdependent. They are difficult to isolate and they tend to interact and influence each other. It is important to note that low health literacy is **not** language dependent. Additionally, culture seems to be a prime mediator among these various factors.

Another series of clips of people of different ages, ethnicities, and situations is presented.

The U.S. is becoming ever more linguistically and culturally diverse. The number of people who spoke a language other than English at home has more than doubled in the last three decades and at a pace four times greater than the nation's population growth.

Charts illustrating the information being discussed are presented.

In that time frame, the percentage of non-English language speakers grew by one hundred and forty percent while the nation's overall population grew by thirty-four percent.

A male doctor is interacting with a female patient and a female Nurse/Interpreter, who is speaking English to the Doctor and Spanish to the patient.

Interpreter to Doctor So, she says in this moment she's feeling better; yesterday she felt a little bit of pain, but she's feeling much better today.

Doctor And her chest?

Interpreter to Patient In your chest was the pain, correct?

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The three characters continue to interact as the Narrator's voice is heard.

Narrator The rise in our nation's non-English speakers calls for rapid and innovative responses on the part of health care systems to ensure that trained healthcare interpreters are immediately available when required. Health equity is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people.

A disparity is a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social or economic disadvantage. Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater social and economic obstacles to health.

HRSA views effective cross-cultural communication as health disparity, quality, safety and civil rights issues.

A montage of people of different ethnicities and situations is presented.

Health literacy must be viewed within a cultural context.

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HRSA has a web-based health communication training tool designed to improve interaction between healthcare providers and their patients. This interactive training course Effective Communications Tools for Healthcare Professionals aims to raise the quality of provider-patient interactions by teaching providers and their staff how to gauge and respond to their patient's health literacy, cultural background and language skills. The course's five modules take five hours to complete. Modules one through four provide an introduction to health communication, health literacy, cultural competency and limited English proficiency. In module five, participants can apply information learned in previous modules to test their ability to communicate effectively with patients. This year we are working to expand this course to include more ethno-cultural specific information: tools and resources on particular ethnic and racial groups, including LGBT patients, with clinical aids related to the cultural diversity of LGBT patients within ethnic and racial groups.

Here is the front screen of this course.

It is important to note that a number of accrediting bodies, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Diabetes Educators Association, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the American Association of Health Education and the National Association of Social Workers award up to five free credits for completing this course.

The HRSA mission statement is the framework that supports a healthcare system that assures access to comprehensive, culturally competent quality care. In order to fully integrate cultural and linguistic competence and health literacy factors into HRSA funding opportunity announcements, new suggestive guidelines have been developed to improve the effectiveness of healthcare communication between providers and their patients.



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Programs are encouraged to apply these principles whenever appropriate in their policies and practices. Please remember that these are guidelines and suggestions for preparing responsive applications. They are **NOT** directives.

Please feel free to contact the name listed in the funding opportunity announcement at any time for further clarification regarding this effective healthcare communication policy.

Also available on these web pages are links to other public resources and tools of cultural competence, linguistic competence and health literacy that we have found for you to use. We encourage you use these links to assist in the preparation of your application.

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