Pilot Study of a Health Literacy Intervention Tool for Healthcare Providers Who Serve Rural Elderly Populations

Abstract
Health literacy (HL) is a major problem in the United States; yet, there is limited research which demonstrates how to effectively manage and eliminate disparities related to poor health literacy levels in at-risk populations. Individuals at greatest risk for poor health outcomes include the rural elderly. Healthcare outcomes are significantly correlated with an individual's level of health literacy (Wolf, Gazmararian, & Baker, 2005). As a result, there is evidence of poor chronic disease management and poor adherence to medications. The purpose of this capstone project was to develop and pilot test a health literacy critical pathway model, for use by providers serving vulnerable populations such as the rural elderly. An integrative systematic review of the literature on health literacy was conducted from a broad spectrum of health disciplines which gave rise to the investigator-generated Health Literacy Intervention Tool (HIT). This tool was distributed among a convenience sample of health practitioners who serve a rural population in Mississippi to determine its' usefulness. Thirty-three days following implementation of the HIT, all participants met with the investigator for post testing and to determine their perception of the usefulness of the HIT tool in clinical practice. Post test results of the survey revealed a statistical significance in five of the survey questions related to usefulness of the HIT. Qualitative results confirmed that all providers determined the HIT tool as useful in assessing health literacy in the rural elderly. The overall consensus was that the use of the HIT tool improved their technique of assessing health literacy. The HIT appears to be an easy-to-use tool for practitioners in the clinical setting to address health literacy needs. DNP leaders are encouraged to investigate other populations that are conducive to use of the tool and to advocate for the assessment of health literacy in all patient care populations.