

# Perspective Review: Enhancing Health Literacy and Self-Care Abilities among Individuals with Chronic Diseases

**Kusrini S. Kadar<sup>1,2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Nursing, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Asistant Professor, Department of Nursing, College Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Ajman University, UAE*

\*Corresponding author: [k.kadar@ajman.ac.ae](mailto:k.kadar@ajman.ac.ae)

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## Introduction

Health literacy is an essential element in the effective management of chronic diseases. It provides a foundation for individuals to understand, evaluate, and utilize health information, thus enabling them to make well-informed decisions regarding their care. For individuals living with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, health literacy is not just about understanding their health needs; it is about empowering them to manage their conditions effectively, make informed healthcare decisions, and maintain a higher quality of life. This writing explores the multidimensional relationship between health literacy and self-care abilities among people with chronic diseases, examining the factors affecting health literacy, its impact on self-care, strategies for improvement, and the pivotal role of health professionals in this context.

## Factors Affecting Health Literacy

Based on the literature, there are many factors that can affect health literacy, from personal background, socioeconomic condition, and environmental influences. Socioeconomics, including education, income, and occupation, have been correlated with health literacy and health behaviors (Furuya et al., 2015; Malini et al., 2023). Several studies have shown a correlation between educational background and health literacy level (Jansen et al., 2018; Malini et al., 2023). Individuals with higher education levels tend to have better health literacy, enabling them to navigate the healthcare system more effectively and make informed decisions about their healthcare (Smith et al., 2019). Other factors that can affect health literacy are cultural and linguistic. Cultural beliefs and language proficiency significantly influence health literacy. Patients not native speakers of the primary language used in healthcare settings may struggle to understand medical instructions, health information, and the nuances of their conditions (Allen-Meares et al., 2020). Cultural beliefs around health and illness contribute to an individual's ability to understand and act on a healthcare provider's instructions (Shaw et al., 2008). Even with adequate reading, writing, and numeracy skills, if cultural norms match the dominant values of the healthcare system, an individual can easily access health services, communicate with providers, and pursue effective self-management. Perception, values, and beliefs are the most significant examples of implicit activity directly influencing people to adopt a particular behavior (Ghorbani-Dehbalaei et al., 2021).

Age and cognitive abilities are claimed to be one factor influencing one's health literacy. Older adults and individuals with cognitive impairments may face challenges understanding complex health information, impacting their health literacy and self-care ability (Chesser et al., 2016). Age-related decline in cognitive abilities and specific health conditions like dementia can significantly impact health literacy (Geboers et al., 2018). Tailoring health communication to accommodate these changes is crucial for effective disease management among the elderly and those with cognitive impairments. Cognitive abilities are needed to solve complex problems involving new information (Putri et al., 2021).

### **Effects of Health Literacy on Self-Care among People with Chronic Disease**

Health literacy significantly affects an individual's ability to understand their chronic condition and adhere to recommended treatments (Alqarni et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2020). The prevalence of chronic diseases is significantly lower among the group with adequate health literacy (Liu et al., 2020). High health literacy is associated with better medication adherence, recognizing early signs of complications, and, more often, seeking medical help. Conversely, low health literacy can lead to misinterpretation of symptoms and mismanagement of the condition, resulting in poorer health outcomes (Magnani et al., 2018). Studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between health literacy and health outcomes in chronic disease patients. Individuals with higher health literacy levels exhibit lower hospitalization rates, better disease management, and an overall higher quality of life (Shahid et al., 2022). This relationship underscores the importance of health literacy in reducing healthcare costs and improving the efficiency of healthcare delivery (Magnani et al., 2018).

The psychological impact of chronic diseases is profound, with many patients experiencing anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem related to their condition, especially those who come from low socioeconomic conditions (Van Wilder et al., 2021). Health literacy empowers patients, enhancing their self-efficacy in managing their health and reducing feelings of helplessness and depression. It fosters a positive attitude toward disease management, crucial for long-term self-care and psychological well-being (Dinh & Bonner, 2023).

### **Strategies to Improve Health Literacy**

Tailored educational programs that address chronic disease patients' specific needs and learning styles can significantly improve health literacy (Kadar et al., 2023). These programs should focus on practical skills such as reading medication labels, understanding dietary needs, and recognizing symptoms. Incorporating visual aids (Park & Zuniga, 2016), interactive sessions, and culturally relevant materials can enhance learning and retention (Kadar et al., 2023). Digital tools, including mobile apps and online platforms, offer accessible and user-friendly options for improving health literacy (Fitzpatrick, 2023). Another approach is to involve the community to support people with chronic diseases. Community-based workshops and support groups are vital in enhancing health literacy among chronic disease patients (Kadar et al., 2023). These forums provide opportunities for shared learning, exchange of experiences, and social support, which are invaluable for encouraging self-care practices and improving health literacy.

### **Role of Health Professionals in Improving Health Literacy**

Health professionals, especially nurses and primary care providers, are on the frontline of patient education and support. They are uniquely positioned to assess health literacy levels and adapt communication strategies accordingly. Techniques

such as the "teach-back" method, where patients are asked to repeat information in their own words, can ensure understanding (Kanang et al., 2021; Talevski et al., 2020). Simplifying complex information, using plain language, and providing written materials for home review are effective strategies that make healthcare providers deliver accurate and accessible information and provide the support necessary for patients' self-care and health issue-related decision-making (Kim & Oh, 2020). Creating health-literate healthcare organizations that facilitate easy navigation and understanding for patients is crucial (Charoghchian Khorasani et al., 2020; Farmanova et al., 2018). Policies that promote clear communication, patient-centered care, and accessibility of health information can transform the healthcare experience for individuals with chronic diseases, leading to improved health literacy and self-care outcomes.

## Conclusion

Health literacy is a fundamental component of effective chronic disease management, influencing self-care practices, health outcomes, and overall quality of life. Through targeted educational interventions, technology-based solutions, and robust support from health professionals, it is possible to enhance health literacy among individuals with chronic diseases. The collective effort of healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations is essential in fostering an environment that supports health literacy improvement, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and a more empowered patient population.

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