



Assessment 3: Applying Ethical Principles

NURS-FPX4000: Developing a Nursing Perspective

Health Literacy Defined

- Health literacy encompasses person's understanding/knowledge, motivation and ability to access, understand, evaluate and apply health information for implementation of health care information (Sørensen et al., 2022).
- Lack of health literacy cause improper medication use, poorer self-management of chronic diseases and increased health disparities (Ayre et al., 2023).
- Research indicates lack of health literacy contributes to increased mortality, morbidity, medication errors, and hospitalizations (Coughlin, et al., 2020).





Autonomy and Health Literacy

- Health literacy improvement increases the autonomy of patients by allowing decisions of healthcare based on actual knowledge (Sørensen et al., 2022).
- Patients (particularly older adults or those who face language barriers) typically cannot make sense of medical information without support and this invalidates their ability to consent and make decisions.
- Ethically, healthcare providers must honor the patient's right to understand – plain language and teach-back for example.



Beneficence & Health Literacy

- **Promoting Patient Well-being:** Increasing health literacy gives patients the power to understand and make informed health decisions hence better outcomes (Cheraghi et al., 2023).
- **Nursing Responsibility:** Nurses have the responsibility in offering simple and easy to understand health information to the patients to support them in their understanding.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** Health literacy interventions have proved to decrease hospital readmissions and improve management of chronic diseases.

Nonmaleficence and Health Literacy

- **Do no harm:** Failure to consider health literacy can damage the health of patients unknowingly. For instance, if there are communication gaps between the patients and their health care provider, then such can result with medication errors or mismanagements (Munsour et al., 2024).
- Providers must ensure understanding so that adverse outcomes are averted. Not rectifying such literacy problems can lead to “severely negative health consequences”.
- Strategies such as teach-back and avoiding medical jargon will, however, help avoid harm brought about by misunderstandings.





Justice & Health Literacy

- Justice requires equitable care. Low health literacy frequently coexists with social disadvantage such as old age, low education, language minority, thus justice requires special support.
- Health literacy and therefore poor outcomes is a violation in the healthcare system. We need to minimize this by making sure all patients will receive easily understandable information (Munsour et al., 2024).
- Ethically, health care organizations should minimize (literacy related) disparities such as provision of interpreter services and literacy appropriate materials such that no one group is placed at an unfair disadvantage.



Chronic Disease Management: Ethical Implications of Health Literacy

- **Autonomy:** Limited health literacy can prevent chronic disease patients from comprehensively comprehending the complex nature of treatment plans and consent information thereby deconstructing informed consent and self-determination (Evripidou et al., 2024).
- **Beneficence:** Nurses need to also “actively educate” patients, for example, plain language, and teach backs so, to adhere to regimens and self-manage their conditions (Marshall et al, 2025); tailored education by health care providers have shown to improve medication knowledge and adherence.
- **Nonmaleficence:** Low understanding of instructions including medication times can accidentally lead to harm. Clear communication and confirmation of comprehension minimizes such harm.
- **Justice:** The low literacy level in health is often associated with social disadvantage and health inequities. Ethical care calls for equitable access to comprehensible information and resources (e.g. culturally appropriate materials, interpreters) for all patients to be able to gain equally.

Bias, Health Literacy, and Ethics



- Inherent biases such as assumptions about age, language, or education can reinforce the health-literacy barriers. For example, if one presumes that none of the older patients will be able to use technology, paternalistic care is created (Gomez-Hernandez et al., 2022).
- Such biases violate ethical principles; they diminish autonomy and justice of vulnerable patients.
- Low literacy intensifies injustices in already vulnerable groups (Mohamed et al., 2024).
- It is important to be aware and tackle bias.
- Adaptation of communication to the patient's needs rather than using stereotypes, is applied in practice to the four principles.



Sphere of Care – Ethics in Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

- ▶ Patient's education is key in wellness or prevention of disease. Ethical practice guarantees that everyone receives easy to understand preventive health information such as screenings, vaccines, hygiene advice etc (AbdulRaheem, 2023).
- ▶ Knowing the concept of ethics requires that we embrace the empowerment of the public with knowledge of health (respecting autonomy: informed choices of prevention; beneficence actively enhances population health).
- ▶ As Sørensen et al. (2022) conclude ethical health literacy practices will secure just health care in both prevention and promotion.
- ▶ Safeguarding clarity of communication in this sphere serves to fair prevent disease for all.



Ethical Dilemmas in Low Health Literacy

- Informed Consent Challenges: Patients that have low health literacy level may find it difficult to read and understand the consent forms, thereby taking unsupported decisions (Burks & Keim-Malpass, 2019).
- Autonomy vs. Protection: We must balance the respect that we have for the autonomy of patients with the need to protect those who might not be able to appreciate medical information.
- Therapeutic Privilege: The healthcare providers might cover up the facts so that caregivers do not go through a difficult time, and this has raised all issues about transparency in issue being handled.



Conclusion

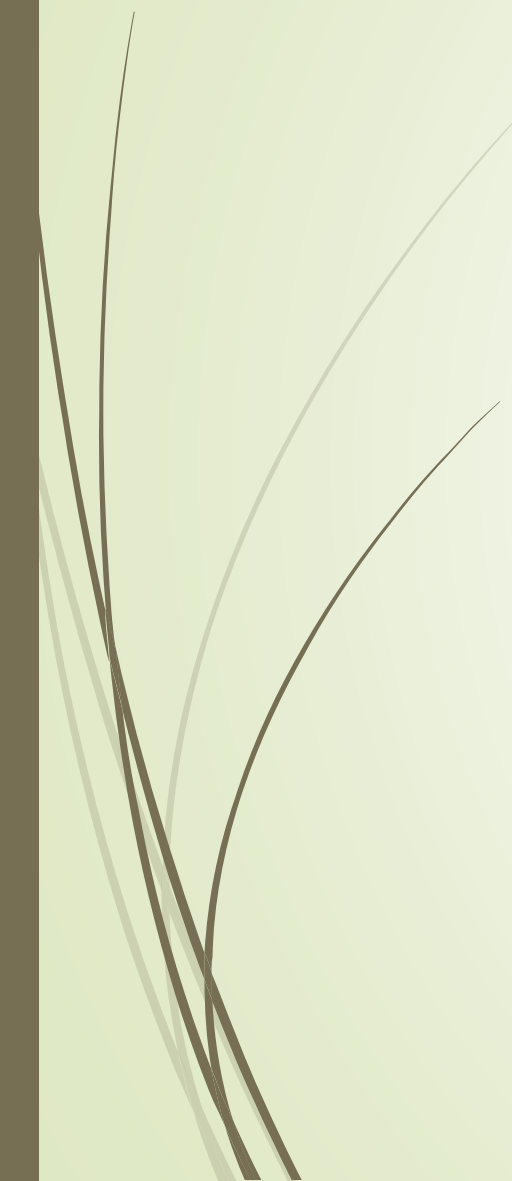
- Health literacy promotes all four principles it enhances patient's autonomy, increases outcomes, minimizes negative outcomes (nonmaleficence), and minimizes inequity.
- By ignoring health literacy, one moans injustice and poor care. There is an ethical responsibility that clinicians and systems must overcome literacy barriers particularly for vulnerable people.
- Key takeaway: Increasing health literacy is a moral imperative for patient-centered care. It is necessary for safe, respectful and equitable healthcare.

References

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