

Towards tailored medication self-management

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Impact paragraph

In Europe, people are living longer, which results in an increased number of elderly people. Among them, a significant proportion are affected by one or more chronic diseases. The majority of care is provided through self-management by the people with the chronic disease themselves. A vital component in the management of chronic diseases is adequate medication use. Many patients experience their medication self-management to be difficult, especially those with limited health literacy. To improve patients' medication self-management, support is essential. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore the needs of patients with a chronic disease and limited health literacy regarding medication self-management as well as how medication self-management support can be tailored to those needs.

Scientific impact

This thesis maps the needs for medication self-management of people with limited health literacy. This patient perspective is a valuable contribution to the scientific knowledge on medication self-management support. How health interventions for patients with limited health literacy should be designed and implemented is a critical field that has received increasing attention over the last decade. This thesis adds scientific knowledge and insights to this domain, specifically in the area of medication self-management. First, it clarifies the medication self-management needs of people with limited health literacy and a chronic disease, thus providing scientific evidence upon which to build further research in this area. This will also allow intervention developers to more effectively tailor medication self-management support tools to the needs of this patient group. Second, this thesis provides an overview of current interventions tailored to people with limited health literacy in the Netherlands as well as other European countries. The studies conducted on these interventions provide further insights into the promising elements for interventions for people with limited health literacy. For example, they reveal that the content of medication self-management support for people with limited health literacy should focus on acquiring both knowledge and skills, and that information should be provided in clear and easy-to-understand language, preferably with the aid of images or animations.

Societal impact

This thesis could lead to improved medication self-management support for patients with limited health literacy and a chronic disease. This would benefit not only this group of patients, who are currently often not actively involved in self-management programs, but also the healthcare system and society as a whole.

When patients are better able to perform self-management activities, their health outcomes are enhanced and they rely less on healthcare professionals, which leads to a lower healthcare demand and reduced healthcare costs. This thesis addresses how to optimally support patients with limited health literacy in their medication self-management. Medication self-management support should not only focus on increasing knowledge but also address learning skills and the acquisition of self-confidence. The content should be tailored to the needs of patients, and furthermore, the support can be provided most effectively by people who the patients with limited health literacy know and trust. The studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that healthcare professionals often have difficulty estimating patients' health literacy level and find it difficult to tailor their communication to this patient group. This thesis reveals that while healthcare professionals are willing to support medication self-management, a more active delivery approach and training for professionals are required to reach patients with limited health literacy.

Dissemination of findings

Various channels have been used to disseminate the findings of this thesis to researchers, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders. All of the articles in this thesis have been published in international, peer-reviewed journals. Two of the articles are accessible free of charge since they are open access. Moreover, all articles are accessible free of charge through the Nivel.nl website. The findings of this thesis have also been presented at national and international conferences, such as the 4th European Health Literacy Conference and the Spring Congress 2021 of the Royal Dutch Society for the Promotion of Pharmacy. The abovementioned channels reach researchers and other stakeholders, such as pharmacists. In addition, the findings have been shared at courses of the bachelor's program Pharmaceutical Business Administration and Healthcare Management at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, with the aim of enabling future healthcare professionals to understand the concept of health literacy as well as how they could more effectively support people with limited health literacy.