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Health Literacy as a Pathway to Promoting the Health of Young Adults

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Purpose:

Nurses are integral to the health literacy of individuals and populations as nurses promote health and are in direct contact with those individuals accessing and using health services (Bauer, 2011). To be able to support individuals in the management of their health it is important that nurses understand, and are able to apply their understanding of health literacy to the delivery of nursing care to individuals and populations (Johnson, 2015).

Health literacy is a concept that was initially explored by health professionals in the 1990s, to provide insight into the health behaviour and health outcomes of individuals, in particular non-compliance with prescribed treatment (Parker, Baker, Williams & Nurss, 1995). The concept was then explored from the health promotion perspective (Nutbeam, 2000; Ratzan, 2001; Kickbusch, Wait, Maag, McGuire, & Banks, 2005) with Nutbeam (2008) providing an analysis of the two perspectives resulting in health literacy being seen as either as an asset or a risk for the individual's health. There is now a deeper and clearer understanding of the concept (Sorensen et al., 2012) with the World Health Organisation (2015) defining health literacy as 'the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health' (Health information sheet 1, para 2).

Measures of health literacy have also been undertaken in an effort to indicate the most effective health care provider information and activities that best suit the individual health consumer in the delivery of health services (Osborne et al., 2013; Sand-Jecklin, & Coyle, 2014). There is a need to not only consider the health literacy skills of the client, but also the quality, format and language of the information provided so that it is readily accessible easily understood by the lay person.

While health literacy is widely accepted as a health determinant (Kickbusch, 2001; Yin et al., 2012), there has been limited investigation of health literacy from the consumer's perspective. The aim of this study was to identify, describe and explain how young adults (18-24 years) enact health literacy from the perspective of the young adult and in doing so inform the promotion of young adult health incorporating the delivery of health information and services for young adults by health professionals, in particular nurses.

Methods:

Constructive grounded theory, an accepted qualitative method used to explore the social behaviour of different groups (Charmaz, 2014), was the method used in this study. Data was collected via semi-structured individual and group interviews. Sampling was initially purposive followed by a theoretical approach with twelve young adults (males n = 8; females n = 4), from across the education and socioeconomic spectrums in eastern Australia, participated in the study. In accordance with constructive grounded theory, data collection, coding and analysis were carried out concurrently with data collection ceasing on data saturation (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Results:

A theory of Young Adult Health Literacy was constructed providing an abstract representation of study participants' enactment of health literacy. The model is comprised of five components - 1. *My Health* – the core component incorporates the young adult's perception of being healthy and unhealthy; 2. *Learning about Health* – represents knowledge acquisition by the young adult via formal, vicarious and experiential learning; 3. *Developing Meaningful Knowledge* – symbolises young adults purposely seeking health information on health and health services allowing for variance in sources of information, information sought and the validation and trust of that information; 4. *Making Health Decisions* – sees the young adult empowered to manage their health acknowledging that this will be affected by the young adult's a) beliefs on managing health b) maintenance of health; and c) access and use of health services; 5. *Context*- represents the dynamics of daily living for young adults affected by the competing life demands of young adults -work, study, leisure and relationships. The model demonstrates how each component is integral to health literacy, allows for variance in young adult knowledge, skills and abilities with the multi layering of the model signifying the interdependence of components. These components provide the opportunity for nurses to support young adults in the management of their health.

Conclusion:

The Young Adult Health Literacy theory provides an understanding of the health literacy of a small group of young adults hence has limitations. The theory however, can now be tested in the young adult as well as other populations; and identifies opportunities for health professionals, in particular nurses, as well as health services to promote young adult health literacy and health over the spectrum of the young adult's life within the various contexts of health care that is, acute nursing care, community nursing care, health promotion and public health.

Title:

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Keywords:

constructive grounded theory, health literacy and young adults

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Abstract Summary:

The health literacy concept has many perspectives. This presentation provides the young adult perspective that is how young adults enact health literacy and as such identifies opportunities for nurses to promote the health of young adults

Content Outline:

Introduction

- a. Nurses are integral to the health literacy of individual and population health literacy.
- b. To promote health literacy nurses require an understanding of the health literacy of individuals and populations.

Background

Main Point 1. Health literacy has been developing as a concept over the last 25 years.

- a. Initially resulted from investigations into non-compliance with prescribed treatment
- b. Expanded to include the perspectives of public health/health promotion
- c. Measurements of individual and population health literacy developed
- d. There is a need to ensure that the information provided by health professional is accessible
- e. Limited available information of how individuals enact health literacy
- f. Understanding how a population enacts health literacy will inform the information and services provided for young adults by nurses

Method

Main point 1. Qualitative approach - constructive grounded theory

- a. Sampling initially purposive followed by theoretical sampling
- b. Data collected from individual and group interviews
- c. Data collection and analysis undertaken concurrently
- d. Data collection ceased with data saturation

Results

1. A theory of young adult health literacy was constructed comprising of five interactive components My Health, Learning about Health, Developing Meaningful Knowledge, Making Health Decisions, and Context.
2. These components allow for variance in young adults and young adult experience and behaviour

Conclusion

The young adult health literacy theory provides opportunities for promoting the health of young adults

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Professional Experience: Julie Shaw is a registered nurse with 30 years of experience in clinical areas

and education. Julie's expertise is in the area of public health. Julie was awarded a Master of Public Health from Sydney University in 2002 and was conferred with her PhD on completion of constructing a theory of the Health Literacy of Young Adults in 2017 by Central Queensland University, Australia. The other areas of research interest include the experiences of international (foreign) students studying in Australian higher education; and the supporting learning in the workplace.

Author Summary: Julie Shaw is an experienced Australian nurse educator and academic. Julie is a lecturer at Griffith University Queensland, teaching into the undergraduate nursing program. Currently Julie holds a joint appointment with Gold Coast Health to support nursing students, the graduate transition program and to promote scholarship.

Second Author

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Professional Experience: Tony Welch has held a number of positions in the discipline of nursing in the private and public sectors of the health care industry (Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Hong Kong) including working as a Hospital Manager, Director of Nursing Unit Manager, Principal Educator, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Director of Post-Graduate Studies. I have also been a foundation member of two Schools of Nursing in Australia. Thirty years of teaching in the tertiary sector have included Professional Development, Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing, Creative Arts Therapy, Counselling, Spirituality, Men's Health, Qualitative Research Methods, Evidence-based Practice, Trans-cultural Nursing, Indigenous Health, Community Health, and Philosophic Inquiry and the supervision of post graduate students with a focus on qualitative research. Other professional activities have included invited International Scholar/Professor, Invited Keynote Speaker, Member of an Aged Care Consultancy Team to China under the auspices of the Myer Foundation, and Ministerial appointments

Author Summary: Tony Welch has held a number of positions in the discipline of nursing in both the private and public sectors of the health care industry (Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Hong Kong) including working as a Hospital Manager, Director of Nursing Unit Manager, Principal Educator, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies, and Director of Post-Graduate Studies. Other professional activities include invited: International Scholar/Professor and Keynote Speaker at international conferences.

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Professional Experience: Moira Williamson is an experienced registered nurse, midwife, nurse educator and academic with over 35 years of nursing experience and and 20 years in nurse education. Moira's expertise is in the promotion of health in particular her research on the experiences of fathers; and the education of nurses. Moira is a leader in nursing and is a Fellow of the Australian College of Midwives,

and been a representative on: 1.Nursing and Midwifery Council of New South Wales (2010-15)
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Author Summary: Moira Williamson is the Dean of the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Sciences at Central Queensland university, Queensland Australia. Moira is a leader in nursing and midwifery in Australia with a history of excellent nursing and midwifery clinical expertise as well as being highly regarded as an academic.