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Psychology

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Reading Levels in a Homeless and Low Income Urban Community

OBJECTIVE: To determine reading literacy and visual disturbance secondary in a sample of low income or homeless persons. To determine mean reading grade levels in an inner city population to understand the gap in population-specific variances as they are related health outcomes or access to health care.

METHODS: A quantitative descriptive study including demographic and health history data surveys and chart reviews. The Snellen eye chart measured visual acuity and/or visual complications. The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) analysis was used to test the reading and comprehension levels .

RESULTS: In a sample of 90 participants from two practice sites of the Care Alliance Inc. clinics it was found that the mean age was 45 years old, of which 78.9% were male. Seventy six percent were unemployed. 23.3% had a history of diabetes mellitus and 30% had a history of hypertension. 93.3% reported that they did not have visual problems or a history of ocular surgeries or conditions. The mean grade level for reading was 9.96. The mean grade level of comprehension was 9.49. The mean score for the population sample in reading and comprehension was lower than the norm for adult taking the WRAT test. The mean composite percentile for the sample was 28.56%. 71.44% of the takers of the same test scored higher.

CONCLUSION: Most patients literacy levels were at high school level which indicates the patients had an adequate ability read and understand medical education material, written directives and prescription direction written at that level. The history of diabetes mellitus and history of hypertension did not have a impact on comprehension or reading levels. Many of the participants needed reading glasses.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS: With the findings of this research, facilitator of medical organizations and practices may seek health education materials that are appropriate for the reading level. Future health literacy studies should address physician to patient communication with an emphasis on the importance of reading and comprehending the medical material given to the patient.