

Examining the health information horizons of the elderly in the periphery / Hadas Matas

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the knowledge possibilities of elderly people living in peripheral areas who wish to obtain knowledge that could lessen the level of uncertainty they feel as a result of news regarding a change in their health as well as to understand their ability to be partners in the decision-making process with regards to their health situation. Their information-seeking behavior was examined, taking into account their lifestyle in a situation of uncertainty. The role of their health literacy skills in reducing this uncertainty was also examined.

The research subjects were elderly people who, from the day they were born until twenty years ago, considered their doctor to be the exclusive source of knowledge and authority in health-related matters. Nowadays, as a result of the information revolution, they live in an era where medical information is freely available to all those who know how to find it on the internet, and the medical establishment is interested in involving the patient in making decisions regarding his or her own health. In this reality the elderly patients are not only expected to find the relevant information themselves, but are also expected to discuss their findings and treatment options with the doctor. The need to be involved in their own health management is a new phenomenon for many elderly people. Whilst it is empowering, it can also be confusing and uncomfortable. Moreover, finding the information, which at this age is a challenge in itself is not enough. Incorrect understanding of the

the subjects. The focus was on their use of these sources and on their understanding the research at a level which enabled them to make and implement decisions.

Due to the fact that not all the subjects were health literate, we point out the need to increase health literacy levels in this population sector. We hypothesize that good instructions in looking for and using medical information would result in the subjects having helpful medical information instead of being fed unprofessional knowledge from friends and acquaintances.

We recommend to conduct a follow-up study to examine whether elderly people increased their health literacy as a result of participation in a course designed for this purpose. The subjects would be examined before and after participation in a course to check any changes.

This study is likely to contribute to our understanding of the various elements involved in our understanding of information behavior of elderly people and to develop awareness amongst providers to ensure that their patients not only gather information but also understand what they have found. The role of health care providers is to help the elderly people form an opinion based on reliable information and a good comprehension of this knowledge. We hope that the results of this study will encourage organizations who deal with elderly welfare to increase the health literacy level of elderly people so that they, just like younger people, will become partners in the decision-making process regarding their own health. As a result this could increase their level of health and even lengthen their life span.

System No.
002468819