Title: Health literacy and preventive health behaviors in older adults, Isfahan, Iran (2011): a survey study.

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Abstract: Background: health literacy is a measure of individual’s ability to read, comprehend, and act on medical instructions. Limited health literacy can reduce adults’ ability to comprehend and use basic health-related materials—such as prescription and food labels, health education pamphlets and articles, appointment slips, and health insurance plans—and thus affect their ability to take appropriate and timely health care action. It is widely accepted that many diseases, illnesses, conditions, and injuries can be prevented or minimized by early detection especially for older adults as an important at risk group. So the Objective of this study was to identify relationships between the health literacy and preventive health practices among older adults.

Method: Pilot survey study of older adults aged 60 years and older was done in Isfahan. About 112 participants were surveyed in this study. We used test of functional health literacy in adults (TOFHLA) to assess the level of health literacy in this group. The method of sampling was clustering and the method of data collection was home interview. We assessed the preventive service usage (mammography, PSA, FOBT) by self reporting. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics methods.

Results: The mean age of participants was 67 ±7.2, 51.8% of them were female and 48.2% of them were male. Overall, (89%) of older adults had limited health literacy. Self-reported lack of preventive services was higher among individuals with limited health literacy than those with adequate health literacy. It means that older adults with poor health literacy were less likely to use preventive services. Women with limited health literacy were less likely to have received mammogram (p < 0.01), men with poor health literacy were less likely to have received PSA test (p < 0.01) and older adults with limited health literacy were less likely to report receiving FOBT test (p < 0.01).

Conclusion: participants with limited health literacy skills were less likely to do screening tests compared to adequate health literacy participants. Primary care providers should attention to this subject and they should know that poor health literacy is an important barrier for participating in preventive screening tests especially for older adults that these screening tests are more essential. Further researchs are needed to determine if educating low health literacy individuals about screening tests can increase screening rates.

Health literacy, preventive health behaviors, Older adults.

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