

High blood pressure: does it matter to know your disease condition and prescribed medicines well?

High blood pressure is a disease condition in which the force of the blood against your artery walls is perpetually high enough that it may eventually cause health problems, such as heart disease. If you have been diagnosed of this disease, knowing the condition and the prescribed medicines very well is invaluable. This message is still not well understood by the public, particularly in developing countries which are worst affected by high blood pressure. Lower literacy levels in these countries has been implicated as a major cause of this problem. However, general knowledge of health issues, better known as health literacy, is quite distinct from general literacy levels. As such, it is not surprising to find low health literacy levels in societies with high general literacy levels. This implies that healthcare workers, including pharmacists and nurses have to put more effort during counselling sessions to drive home the important points of prescriptions and lifestyle modification.

This study investigated how much people living with high blood pressure knew about their disease condition and prescribed medicines in Lesotho, and how health literacy affected treatment outcomes of high blood pressure. In other words, the study sought to establish whether health literacy levels determined the control of blood pressure levels in the affected people. High blood pressure ranks as one of the leading causes of death among adults in Lesotho. Lesotho is a small landlocked country in southern Africa. The country is classified by the United Nations as one of the least developed countries in the world. Apparently, the country has one of the highest literacy levels in Africa. However, most patients diagnosed with high blood pressure in Lesotho have blood pressure levels higher than recommended despite high literacy levels in this population.

The study interviewed people living with high blood pressure on what they knew about high blood pressure as well as their prescribed medicines during their monthly visits to collect their medicines and checked their blood pressure records. Knowledge of appropriate eating habits, exercising, avoiding stress, depression, and overexcitement were among the key lifestyle modifications sought for in those interviewed. In addition, knowledge of frequency of taking the prescribed medicines at appropriate amounts were also probed. Furthermore, the occurrence of bad practices such as increasing the frequency of taking medicines, doubling the amounts of medicines taken at a particular time, and stopping taking the medicines altogether when one felt better were some of the major issues included in the interview on knowledge of medicines.

About 36% of those interviewed had inadequate knowledge about high blood pressure while 44% had inadequate knowledge about their medicines. People living with high blood pressure in this population have limited knowledge of their disease condition and the associated medications. Missing appointment dates was also common. In total, 52% of the patients had defaulted appointment dates while 65% were not taking their medications as prescribed at least once in their lives. Statistical tests revealed that inadequate knowledge of the prescribed medicines was a significant factor contributing to uncontrolled blood pressure. Healthcare workers should therefore

strive to improve patients' knowledge of their prescribed medicines. Raising the awareness of the disease condition of high blood pressure and the prescribed medicines is an important intervention required in people living with high blood pressure.

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