



Health Literacy: Communication Strategies for Health Care Providers

– What is the Evidence? A Systematic Review. Progress Report.

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OBJECTIVE

The ability of a patient to participate in the healthcare decision-making process is affected by health literacy, defined by *Healthy People 2010* as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions." To counter the effects of impaired health literacy, physicians and other healthcare professionals need to develop and utilize skills and techniques to improve communication and the patient's ability to comprehend information.

A preliminary survey of New York Medical College constituents (faculty, residents, and fellows) found that the topics most interesting to those likely or very likely to attend future training are (Figure 1):

1. Strategies to improve communication with patients
2. How to clearly communicate specific instructions to the patient

In order to develop a curriculum regarding the best strategies, we chose to employ a rigorous evidence-based approach.

This systematic review seeks evidence on the effects of known techniques and strategies on healthcare measures such as patient comprehension, satisfaction, treatment compliance and length of stay.

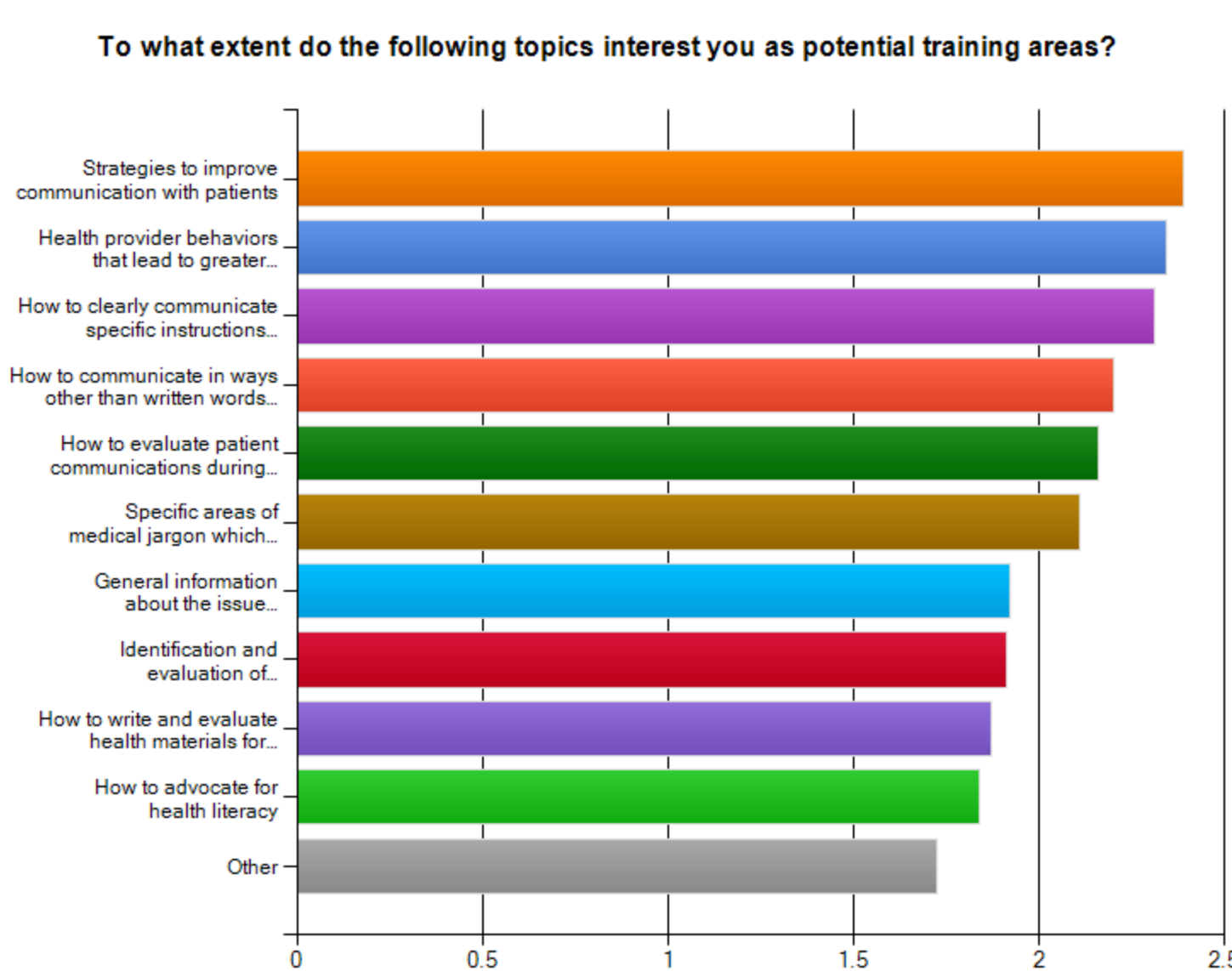


Figure 1. Topics of interest to respondents who indicated they were either likely or very likely to attend health literacy training.

METHODS

Systematic review. PubMed was searched using a highly sensitive search statement in order to review the abstracts of all potentially relevant articles in the database. Yield of the search was 3371 articles. The abstracts were reviewed by two librarians to identify those articles which: 1) discussed techniques and strategies for 2) improved measures which 3) included a stated evaluation component. The two reviewers had a good level of inter-rater reliability in the selection of abstracts for which to obtain complete papers.

Other databases still to be searched: CINAHL, ERIC, Social Science Citation Index, Scopus and the grey literature.

PubMed search strategy:

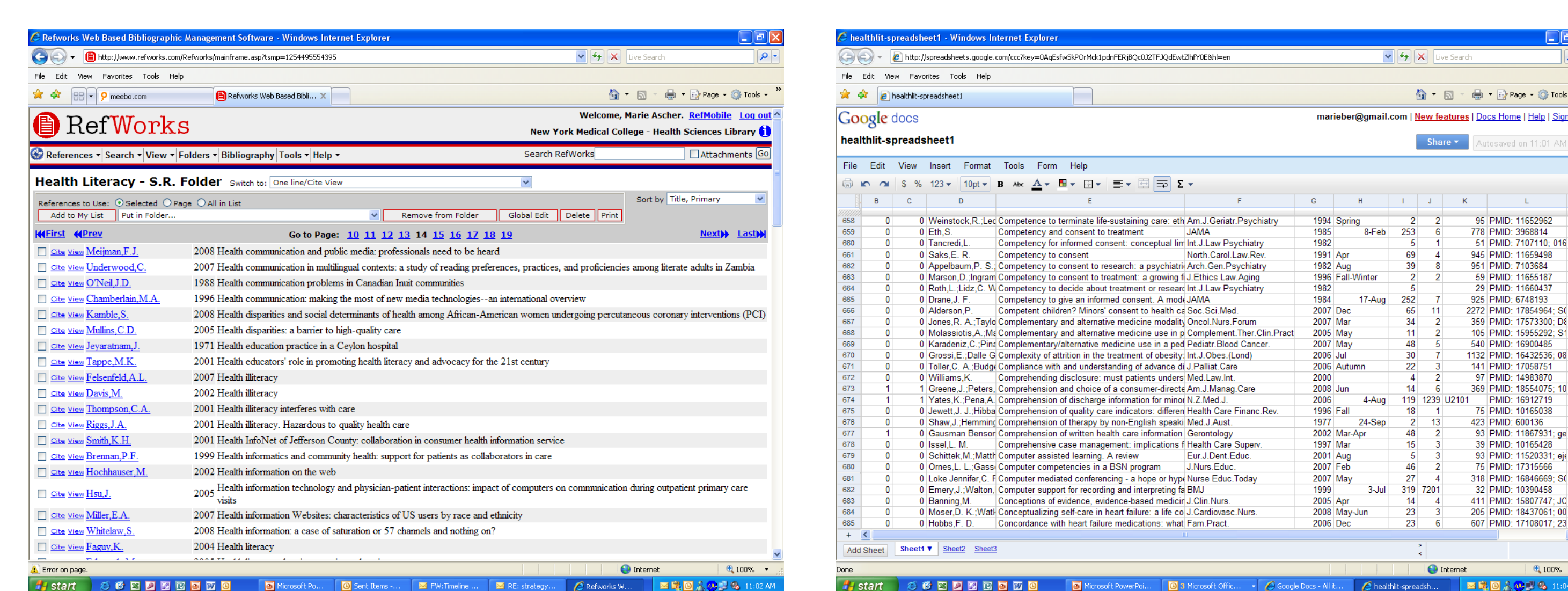
PubMed Search: ("health literacy" OR ("literacy" OR communication barriers[mesh] OR comprehension OR educational status[mesh]) AND ("communication"[mesh:noexp] OR professional patient relations[mesh] OR decision making[mesh] OR patient participation[mesh] OR writing[mesh])) AND (patient* OR consumer*)

Date: 4/24/09 2:00 PM

Results: 3371

Imported to RefWorks Folder: Health Literacy Systematic Review

Tools used:



Inclusion/selection criteria:

- Abstract must mention or suggest at least one strategy or tool or communication skill for improving communication
- Must indicate or suggest some evaluation or testing of said strategy or tool(s)
- NOT excluded based on language
- Outcomes: improved communication, decision-making, participation, comprehension

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The abstract selection phase for the PubMed results are almost completed. The two reviewers had good inter-rater reliability, agreeing 92.5% of the time on the articles to be obtained in full-text for the next phase. Of the 3371 abstracts reviewed, the two selectors ordered an estimated 455 articles for full-text review.

MAJOR EMERGING THEMES (in order of frequency)

Communicating health information and via:

- computer/video/multimedia aids
 - class/consultation
 - quantitative means
 - visualizations

Language differences, facilitating understanding and via:

- computer aids
- interpreters

Writing/designing health-related materials Measurement instruments/assessment tools:

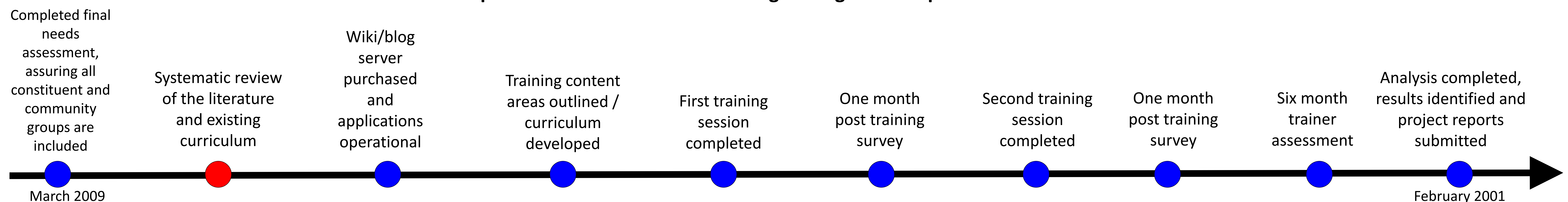
- health literacy
- communication

Cultural differences, facilitating understanding Provider training/education in:

- communication skills
- determining literacy levels

Patient satisfaction Decision aids

Project Timeline: This systematic review is part of a larger project to develop and evaluate an evidence-based train-the-trainer curriculum on health literacy with a focus on specific communication-enhancing strategies for improved outcomes.



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