

# eHealth Literacy

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**Abstract**— *Ehealth literacy is a novel concept which has become crucial in an increasingly technology-driven society. With the growing body of health information available on the Internet, ehealth literacy has become a crucial requirement for promoting health behavior. The goal of ehealth literacy is to make sound health decision through tools that are easily accessible. This paper presents a brief introduction to ehealth literacy.*

**Keywords**— *ehealth literacy, digital health literacy, mental health literacy*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Next to using emails and search engines, looking for health information is the most important activity among Internet users. As more and more people use Internet-based and mobile health resources and as the Internet becomes a major channel for socialization and source of health information, ehealth literacy becomes an important issue. The Internet continues to be an invaluable resource in providing information that is of use to health professionals. This includes information about drugs, side-effects, and therapies. The Internet facilitates access to health information and increases e-health literacy.

Traditional health literacy is one of the basic goals of health education. It deals with the how individuals can obtain and process information to make health decisions. Being health-literate implies that one has the ability to negotiate the health-care system. It also means being able to understand basic health information to make proper health decisions. Low health literacy can have negative impact on health behavior and result in greater hospitalizations [1].

Ehealth (or electronic health) is a new concept which refers to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enable health care. It is the delivery of health information and services over the Internet and related technologies. E-health literacy is the ability to seek and gather health information from digital sources and apply the information to solve health problems. Individuals with high ehealth literacy frequently search the Internet for health information. They are savvy shoppers in the health marketplace and are effective managers of their own care.

Ehealth literacy can be divided into six core literacies [2]: traditional literacy, health literacy, information literacy, scientific literacy, media literacy, and computer literacy. An ehealth-literate individual has higher levels of competence in the six core literacies.

## II. PROMOTING EHEALTH LITERACY

Studies have shown that ehealth literacy is related to education, income, age, nationality, and race. Individuals with low ehealth literacy will not consult Internet-based sources or services for health information in the ehealth era. Patients with low ehealth literacy may not have the skills to interact with the ehealth systems. Low levels of ehealth literacy are associated with poorer health status, poor health outcomes, poor adherence to treatment regimens, and increased hospitalization rates. Some health behaviors (such as cigarette smoking, physical exercise and alcohol consumption) are related to ehealth literacy. Improving ehealth literacy through ehealth interventions will enhance the quality of life for patients [3].

Older adults generally have low e-health literacy, making it difficult for them to function properly in the e-health era [4]. Low ehealth literacy is also pronounced among ethnic minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status. A tool for promoting the ehealth literacy skills of older adults has been provided by Manafa and Wang [5]. There is need for training to increase skills that will enable health consumers identify useful health information. E-health literacy can be improved by improving users' working knowledge of computers and the Internet. Government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health continually put health information online so that people can benefit from it. The Internet has the potential for improving ehealth literacy. Educational interventions offered online can be tailored to individuals' ehealth literacy levels. Internet-enabled ehealth applications can address health disparities [6].

## III. CHALLENGES

Ehealth provides health information to medically underserved populations. Rapid advances in ehealth present both opportunities and challenges. A range of barriers prevent people from fully benefiting from the spectrum e-health provisions. E-health literacy faces at least four challenges. First, inequalities may result from the use of the Internet. It

appears that a large proportion of the general population lacks the skills to keep up. Unequal access to the Internet continues to be responsible for the digital divide. Although inequality of Internet access has declined in developed nations, access is still prohibitively expensive for the elderly and people in low income. Increasing health literacy can narrow health disparities. Second, there is information overload. As the web evolves, an increasing amount of information is available on the Internet. The number of websites continues to grow, their poor organization may make obtaining relevant information difficult. Many websites provide information that is inaccurate, questionable or hard to understand. Health consumers may have difficulties in identifying quality, trustworthy, credible, useful health information online. Regulating information online is difficult. Third, most people still prefer receiving health information through face-to-face physician-patient interaction. Fourth, the issues of privacy and security remain an ongoing major concern, especially in areas involving sensitive behavior or treatment (alcohol, drug use or mental health) and possibly illegal behavior. Privacy, confidentiality, and security are considered as essential freedom of an individual.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Consumer health literacy is critically necessary for the nation's social and economic success in today's technology-rich health care environment. Ehealth refers to health services delivered through ICT. Ehealth literacy focuses on literacy within the context of Internet-based health information and services. It is growing in importance in public health. It relates digital access and literacy. It stands as a major challenge facing healthcare globally.

Increasing ehealth literacy can significantly reduce hospitalization and improve quality of life. Ehealth literacy has been expanding at a rapid rate. Many, such the World Health Organization (WHO), researchers, and government agencies, have responded positively to the growth of ehealth literacy.

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