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Health literacy profiles: are they the same for university students enrolled in health professional degree programs?

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330 - Health literacy profiles: are they the same for university students enrolled in health professional degree programs?

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Background: Poor health literacy is known to negatively impact on patient health outcomes. However, little is known about the health literacy profiles of the different health professionals patients encounter as part of their health care journey. This study aimed to compare the health literacy profiles of students enrolled in health professional degree programs at a regional Australian university.

Methods: Enrolled medical, nursing and allied health university students were invited to complete a survey which included the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ) and demographic information. The survey (available in hard copy and online) was promoted through university Facebook groups, the university’s student messaging facility and during lectures.

Data was analysed in SPSS (v.21). Analysis of the data was consistent with the HLQ guidelines and included calculating the average score, standard deviation and confidence intervals for each HLQ subscale by student health professional group.

Findings: In total, 374 students with a median age of 25 years returned completed surveys. The majority of respondents were medical students (n=242, 65%) with almost equal proportions of both allied health (n=67, 18%) and nursing students (n=62, 17%). Medical students had the highest score for seven of the nine HLQ subscales, while allied health students had the highest score for two of the subscales. Notably, nursing students had the lowest score for each of the nine HLQ subscales.

Discussion: These results indicate that there are gaps in the health literacy profiles of student groups studying to become health professionals. These different health literacy profiles could be used to strengthen areas of the curriculum addressing health literacy education within existing health care professional degree programs. Importantly, inclusion of these tailored health literacy components within degree programs could help to improve student health literacy profiles, which in turn could help to empower their future patients with limited health literacy.