

Basics of Health Promotion and Education Intervention
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Lecture - 10
Health Literacy

So this is the final lecture of this week. We have discussed regarding the basics of health behavior, basics of health promotion and basics of health education. Now in this lecture, we will be discussing about health literacy. You see, when we discuss about certain socio-demographic issues, we come across this concept of literacy, we come across the concept of education and some allied concepts.

So the part health literacy has the term literacy in it. So it has to be something related to literacy, but what kind of literacy? So health, this term health it qualifies literacy as literacy regarding health related issues. So with this basic concept, we will be digging a bit deep into the concepts and several issues regarding health literacy.

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So in this lecture, we will be covering the concept of health literacy and its importance. Then the definitions of health literacy because we will be seeing that there are several definitions over decades, several authors have defined certain things. So we will be discussing those parts. Then we will be coming to classifications, frameworks and the action areas because as I have said, in health promotion and

education intervention, or in the discipline of health promotion and education, we always look for the action points.

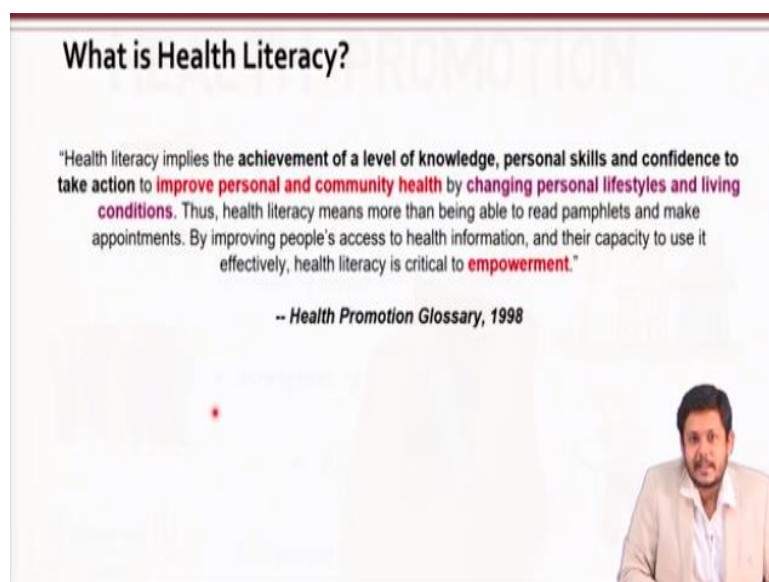
So, it is same with health literacy. We will be again, digging deep into the action points, where we can actually act. And then we will be discussing some emerging concepts or the new theories or the new ideas regarding health literacy, what are the different dimensions that are being recently proposed. And in this regard, we will be discussing a bit about Healthy People 2030 Policy and certain other allied aspects.

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So let us start with our discussion in this lecture.

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So the first point is what is actually health literacy? Now please follow the different highlights that are provided over here. Now this definition is provided from the Health Promotion Glossary of 1998. And it has certain key areas like see, health literacy implies the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills and confidence to take action.

So the first key area is the achievement of a level of knowledge or a personal skill or confidence to take action, right? For what? The next part is to improve personal and community health. So in this definition, you can see that it is not only about the personal health, it is also about the community health in combination, or maybe personal or community health as the case may be.

The next important part is how to improve by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions. So the intervention that we are talking about in health literacy part, because in particular, changing health literacy is in itself a very important intervention. So if we consider that intervention, it will ultimately have an effect on changing the personal lifestyles and living conditions.

So it is not directly related to taking medicines or the medicines perhaps because the taking medicines part is again, a behavior. And again, it is a component of lifestyle, and the living conditions and all the other intangible, or kind of less tangible determinants of health. So that part will be dealt in health literacy, but not the pharmacopoeia part as such. So, it is kind of an implicit intervention as you can expect.

Now the next part says thus health literacy means more than being able to read pamphlets and make appointments. See, reading pamphlets means you have been given certain information through pamphlets, brochures and everything. We often see certain health informations depicted in the walls of the clinics.

So health literacy is not just being able to read those information or it is not just being able to book an appointment of a doctor or in a private clinic or in a government hospital. It is something beyond that. Why it is beyond that? Because it is by

improving people’s access to health information and their capacity to use it effectively health literacy is critical to empowerment.

So the essential component in health literacy is basically empowerment. So without empowerment, we cannot achieve health literacy. Like just relate to the general concept of literacy because education and literacy they are related to empowerment or in other words, social empowerment of the people.

So in this case, you can kind of relate this empowerment with health related empowerment, placing the people’s health in their own hands, in their communities and in the individuals’ hand. So that empowerment concept is catered through the idea of health literacy.

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Definitions of Health Literacy		
World Health Organization	1998	"Cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand, and use information in ways that promote and maintain good health."
American Medical Association	1999	"The constellation of skills, including the ability to perform basic reading and numerical tasks required to function in the health care environment."
Nutbeam	2000	"The personal, cognitive, and social skills which determine the ability of individuals to gain access and understand, and use information to promote and maintain good health."
Institute of Medicine	2004	"The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."
Zarcadoolas, Pleasant, & Greer	2005	"A wide range of skills that people develop to seek out, comprehend, evaluate and use health information and concepts to make informed choices, reduce risks and increase quality of life."
McCabe	2006	"A tapestry of skills combining basic literacy, math skills, and a belief in the basic tenets of the treatment modality."

Now as I have said there are certain definitions of health literacy, right? So I will be discussing this definition in these two tables, because there are lot many definitions. But do not, I mean, do not get confused. Just go through the critical parts of these definitions. Like for example, in the WHO definition, what it says is a cognitive and the social skills.

So if you can remember the basic definition, the basic idea is provided over here, the basic concepts are provided over here. So whatever we will be having, we will be having some kind of iteration from these concepts, right? So in WHO definition, we

can see that the cognitive and the social skills, which determine motivation and ability. Here we see the addition of this part, this motivation part.

So the health literacy will affect the motivation part of the individuals to gain access to understand and use information in ways to promote and maintain good health. So the basic concept of gaining access, understanding and using information is basically to promote health. See this part is basically related to the empowerment part because it is much more than being able to read pamphlets and make appointments, right?

So this is what the WHO definition essentially says. Then there is the American Medical Association definition. It also emphasizes on the skills which, see here it emphasizes on the skills part, including the ability to perform basic reading and numerical tasks, because that is required to do the basic things like reading the pamphlets and gathering information from there or even taking information from any health-related material.

So those basic skills are required. That every definition will acknowledge, but something beyond that, that is required to function in the healthcare environment. This definition is a bit more open, because it allows scope for all the important issues which will help an individual to function, see function in the healthcare environment.

So next, in the immediately next year in 2000, Nutbeam, the paper that was published, in that paper the author said that the personal, cognitive and social skills, which determine the ability of individuals to gain access and understand and use information to promote and maintain good health. So you can see that this definition is essentially related to the WHO definition.

So what happens is basically over and over again, what the definitions that we will be seeing, those are little bit of, I mean you can say little bit of stretch, little bit of analysis of the original definition itself. Like the health promotion glossary definition and the WHO definition. But the essential component in all those definition remains the same that it is not only being able to read or write or seek information, it is something that is related to leading a healthy life.

You have to do or the individual or the community has to perform something to lead a healthy and good life. So for that health literacy is required. And in this next definition again, here the new term is the degree to which individuals have the capacity. See, when we introduced the term degree, it is more of an attempt to quantify the health literacy part.

Because you see in literacy or in terms of in case of education, we quantify in terms of the grades, we quantify in terms of last class pass like this. So this definition kind of targets towards quantifying health literacy as well. That is why it says the degree to which, right? Then you come to the next definition, it is a bit more qualitative definition, because it acknowledges a wide range of skills.

So in the previous definitions, you had a depiction of cognitive and social skills. You have the depiction of this motivation component. You had the depiction of this simple ability term. Now in this definition, they expand all these components into a wide range of skills that people develop, to seek out, comprehend, evaluate and use the health information and concept to make informed choices.

So here you have certain new components coming in. See in this definition, you have another new component like from degree you also have an appropriate health decision. So appropriateness is a new component over here. Then in this 2005 definition, you have a wide range of skills, so acknowledgement of different types of skills and different dimensions of skills is there.

Then you also have an important concept of making informed choices. So this is how the definitions are now evolving of the health literacy definitions. So now we are confirmed that health literacy is not only being able to seek information or see what is provided over there, it is also about making informed choices.

Now that informed choices we will later on discuss that that informed choices part, it does not necessarily mean only to seek care or only to get certain preventive health behavior. It also means when a certain trial is coming up, or a certain interventional study is coming up, the researchers in particular will come to the people, will go to the community for their consent regarding participation.

Now that consent is again called an informed written consent or whatever informed consent. So in that case, also you have to have an informed choice.

So if the intervention is something related to health, and it comes under the purview of health literacy, then if an individual is able to understand or able to make that informed choice regarding whether to participate in the trial or not, whether to participate in the intervention or not, it also comes under the purview of an improved health literacy status of the community.

And in this definition, it again you know combines the skill set. It again elaborates what are the skills. Here you see, in this definition, the author explicitly says that basic literacy is important. Because in the previous definitions, though we had the notion that the literacy part is important, but they were more discussing regarding the cognitive and social skills in a more generalized way.

But here the author has specified that the basic literacy skills, the math skills, and a belief of the basic tenets of treatment modality. Now this is kind of a particular definition, okay.

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Definitions of Health Literacy		
Mancuso	2008	"An evolving lifetime process that includes the attributes of capacity, comprehension and communication."
Freedman et al.	2009	"The degree to which individuals and groups can obtain, process, understand, evaluate, and act upon information needed to make public health decisions that benefit the community."
Berkman, Davis, & McCormack	2010	"Dependent upon individual and system factors, which also include the communication skills, knowledge, and culture of both the professional and lay person, the context as well as the demands of the health care and public health system."
Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010	2010	"The degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions."
Sorensen et al.	2012	"Health literacy is linked to literacy and entails people's knowledge, motivation, and competence to access, understand, appraise and apply health information in order to make judgements and take decisions in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention, and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life during the life-course."

And next in all these definitions we will be ending with the definition provided by Sorensen et al., which is somehow I mean, considered a very holistic and a very broad

definition of health literacy and very acknowledged one. But before that, we have a journey from 2008 to 2012. So in 2008 definition, it says an evolving lifetime process.

So here the new concept or the new philosophy, it is an evolving part. It is not a static thing. It is a dynamic thing. And it again acknowledges capacity, comprehension and communication part. In 2009 definition, it says the degree to which individuals and groups can obtain process or understand or evaluate and act upon. The spectrum of taking information to action, that spectrum is covered here.

Again, the important term is degree. Again, there is a process or there is an attempt to quantify. So next in the 2010 definition, here you can see that the individuals I mean, the dependent, the health literacy part is dependent upon the individual and system factors. Here the system factors are included. It is not only dependent on the individuals, it is also dependent on the milieu where the individual or a particular group of people are nested.

Next, again in this 2010 definition, because see this 2010 definition is an important definition, because see the provider is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010. So it is kind of a legal kind of issue. So from this definition, what we can understand that the health literacy is the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process and understand the basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.

See, this definition and this definition, they are more or less related, because ultimately, this definition was you know kind of transformed and accepted into their definition, their own definition. That is why these are very closely related and the terminologies are mostly similar, right? Now we come to the 2012 definition, the definition by Sorensen et al. It says that the health literacy is linked to literacy, right?

That we have understood because the several other definitions, they are saying that literacy, basic literacy in other words, is an essential component of health literacy. So a health literacy is linked to literacy and entails people knowledge, motivation, competence to access, understand appraise and apply health information. See this is a very holistic line over here or I mean, it is kind of a broad and all encompassing.

How? Because it is linked to literacy, right? Then how does it help? Tells people's knowledge, motivation and competence to access because this definition brings in the concept of competence. Because it is not only about knowing, it is not only about being motivated, it is also about being competent, whether the individual can do that particular thing or not. The competence and to some extent, the self-efficacy also is an important concept in this definition.

And how this helps? This helps to access, understand, appraise. See appraisal is also an important part, and apply health information in order to make judgments and take decisions, right? So this is how this definition I mean it expands the horizon of health literacy. And here it has certain links with the basic definition of epidemiology as well because you see, how health literacy will help?

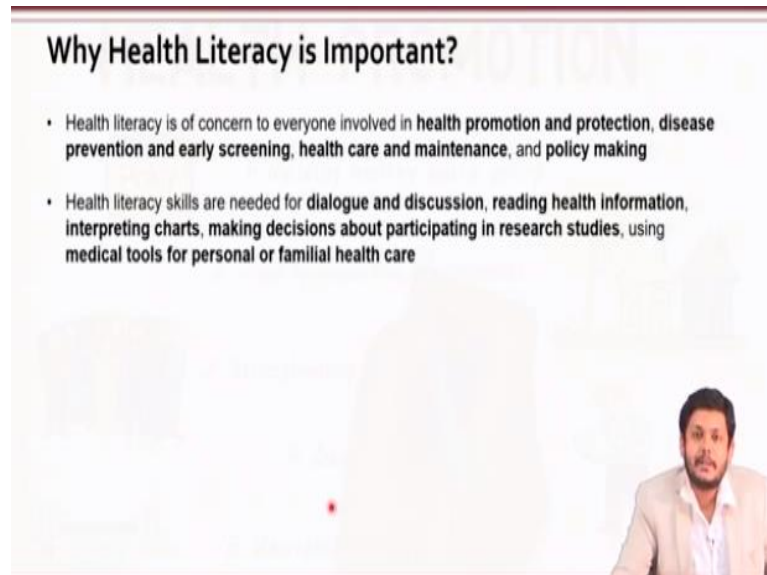
It will help in making judgments and take decisions in everyday life. This is again a philosophy which was there, which was there implicitly in the previous definitions, but Sorensen et al., they explicitly stated. And in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life during the life course.

So the basic idea is not only to get healthcare or the treatment per se, it is also to get an informed decision about disease prevention, injuries and health promotion and everything. So the spectrum of disease is basically covered, when we are talking about health literacy. In each of these spectrum, health literacy plays an important part.

It may be at the beginning during prevention, you may require health promotion for that and you have certain specific knowledge requirements for that, you have certain specific skill requirement for that, but you have health literacy placed in the beginning. Then if the person is diseased or if there is a disease in the community, then you have a treatment or care seeking behavior that is this part concerning healthcare.

So you have that also. And finally, when you go into rehabilitation part also I mean, if the disease is not completely remitted, if there is requirement of a tertiary level of prevention, then also you will have certain this health literacy issues. So this is how it expands the domain.

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Now why health literacy is important? We have discussed the issue of why more or less during this definition part. So just to summarize why health literacy is important, because health illiteracy is of concern to everyone involved in health promotion and protection, disease prevention, early screening, health care and maintenance, and which finally leads to the policymakers because that is how the whole spectrum is completed.

Without the policymakers without the advocacy part, the health literacy component is not complete. Now the health literacy skills are needed for, why they are needed? They are needed for dialogue and discussion because you have to communicate, as a doctor you have to communicate what is wrong with the patient or what are the things that should be done.

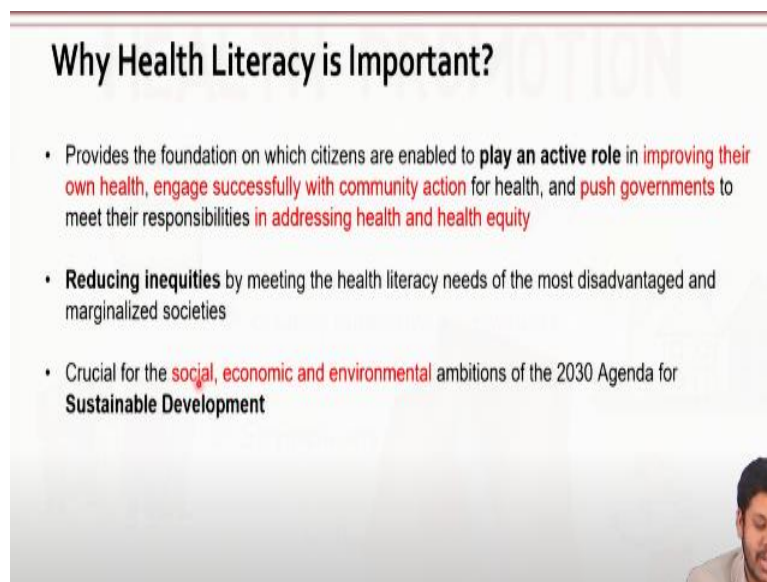
Then reading health information. As a patient also you have to be able to read information. So you see in this part you have a I mean, a two-way communication related issue. So it is not only about the doctor being able to properly communicate, it is also about you to understand that information and then again convey that

information to the others or the next of kin or I mean the individuals who are surrounding you.

So after this part, you also have interpreting charts, because you often see certain charts, certain graphs that this much improvement is there. You might often get to see that there are certain graphs like what was the mortality before the introduction of COVID-19 vaccination program in India and how the mortality changed subsequently, how improvement occurred.

That statistical data is often represented through graphs. So that part is again a part of health literacy, because whether the general population is able to understand all those things or not in making decisions. So all this part this is the basis for understanding health literacy and taking up it as a effective tool.

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Why Health Literacy is Important?

- Provides the foundation on which citizens are enabled to **play an active role** in **improving their own health**, **engage successfully with community action** for health, and **push governments** to meet their responsibilities **in addressing health and health equity**
- **Reducing inequities** by meeting the health literacy needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalized societies
- Crucial for the **social, economic and environmental** ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for **Sustainable Development**

So why it is important? Because it can play an active role in improving their own health, the individual or the community. Then engage successfully with the community action. That is again placing people's own health in their own hands, community participation, everything will be achieved through a proper health literate setting.

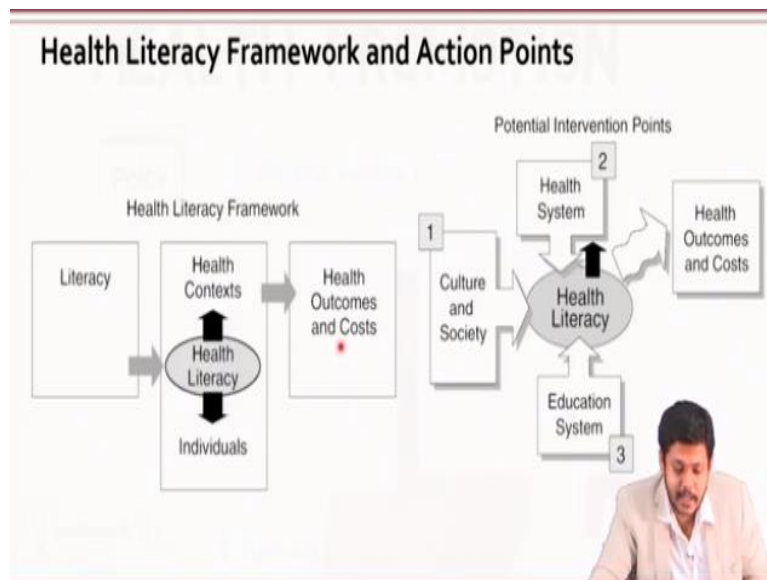
And pushing the government to do the right thing. I mean, the right thing by this I mean, what is needed for the community. That means the government will be pushed to act on the community needs. That is a very important part in health promotion as a

whole. Then the reducing inequities part because health literacy will ultimately reduce the inequities that is prevalent in different marginalized or hard to reach areas.

The social differences that also is contributing to inequities. Now health literacy will ultimately address those issues. And in a holistic way, as you can see, we have the sustainable development goals set for 2030. And for that we have a one health and all-encompassing and integrated approach and for that social, economic and environmental ambitions or the goals.

For those also we need health literacy, because these, I mean health impacts may be the direct effect of health literacy. But the social, environmental and economic aspects related to health, they are the secondary impact or kind of an indirect impact of a better health literate status.

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So now we are in search of the action points. You see this picture, the picture on your left hand side, it shows the health literacy framework in general. Literacy is the contributing factor, as I have already said that literacy contributes to health literacy, because without this basic literacy, we cannot think of health literacy as a whole. So literacy contributes to health literacy.

It has health contexts and it has individual context as well. Then finally it will lead to health outcomes and costs. See this part costs or the secondary impacts. So those are related to those the social, economic and environmental parts as well, just to remind

you of these things. So, this is a kind of a linear relationship from literacy to health outcomes.

And health literacy as a whole is kind of a mediating factor in the relationship between literacy to health outcomes. So, two things to take note. First is without literacy, we cannot think of health literacy. And then because of the particular health literacy status, certain outcomes are defined. This brings us to this picture. On your right-hand side, you can see the potential intervention points, right?

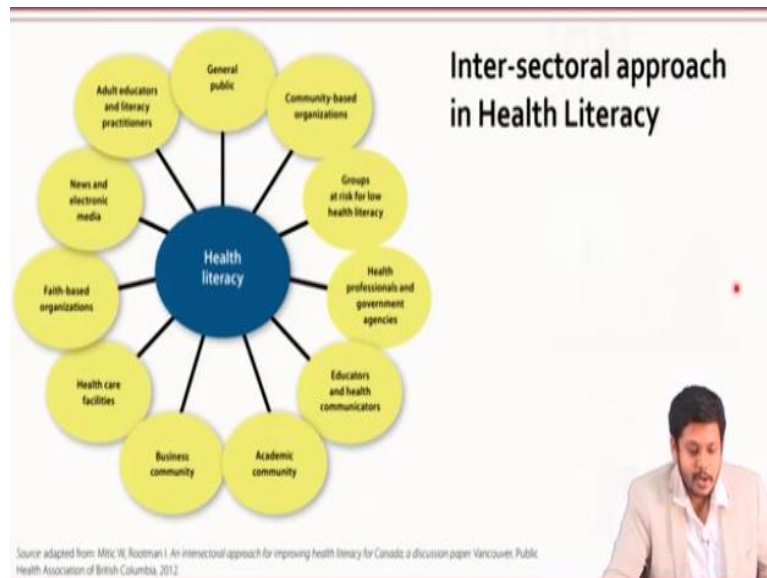
So where do we intervene? The literacy part, the literacy will be already there. The education system, we can intervene over there. We can improve the educational background of the community. We can improve the literacy status of the people through the education system. What we can do? Since this is nested within the society and at large, we can also have an effect through culture and society.

Because see, here it is a kind of a loop in itself. The health literacy will be affected by society and culture or the cultural impacts. Then through health literacy, if we have to improve the health literacy, again we have to act on those culture and society part. Suppose certain beliefs, we can change those to ultimately improve health literacy. Suppose myth busters.

We are busting certain myths, which are actually false. That will ultimately help in improving the health literacy. The health system as a whole. Here the advocacy part and the pushing the government part, it comes into action. So through these three action points, I mean these are all broad action points, but through these three action points, we can aim at improving the health literacy status.

And because we are aiming at improving the health literacy status, we will ultimately have an improved health outcomes and the costs.

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Now this is just for an understanding the inter-sectoral approach in health literacy, because we are already discussing about how health literacy is related to all the different factors of the society, how it is related to environment and everything. So, this gives you an idea of the inter-sectoral approach. This is, I have taken this picture from WHO report and the source is already cited over here.


You can go to the source and find out in details because it is an interesting part. So, what happens here? You can see all the faith-based organizations, the media, the educators and the literacy practitioners, the general public as a whole, the community-based organizations, different groups working in risk populations. And the groups who are already at risk of having a low health literacy, they are also included.

The health educators, the academic community, the researchers, the business community who are having an interest and often may come up with certain corporate social responsibility acts. Then the healthcare facilities are also there. All these are I mean; it is a broad inter-sectoral integrated approach to improve the health literacy of a community.

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Classification

- Nutbeam's (2000) three levels of health literacy: **functional, interactive** and **critical**
- This classification recognizes the role of basic reading, writing and numeracy for health, but moves beyond this to include interactive and critical abilities.
- **Functional health literacy:** **Basic skills** of reading, writing and numeracy necessary to function effectively in a health context.
- **Interactive health literacy:** More **advanced cognitive literacy skills** that with social skills, can be used to actively participate in everyday situations, extract information and derive meaning from different forms of communication, and apply this to changing circumstances.
- **Critical health literacy:** Ability to **critically analyze** information and use this to exert greater control over life events and situations.



This brings us to the classification part because in classification, I have said that Nutbeam's 2000 definition is very important and the author actually implies three different levels of health literacy like the first one is a functional health literacy, then is interactive literacy, and the third one is critical.

Now since you have understood the concept of health literacy and the different evolving definitions, I will just be highlighting what are the basics, why these three levels are provided in this definition. Because remember, this definition was provided or this classification was provided in 2000.

Till that time, the explicit or the all-encompassing definition of Sorensen was not proposed. So, with that background, the functional health literacy, it said, the basic skills... or you can correlate this with the basic literacy skills also. Then you have the interactive health literacy. It is a more cognitive and advanced literacy skill. Here you have the advanced I mean, above basic skills, you have certain advanced skills also.

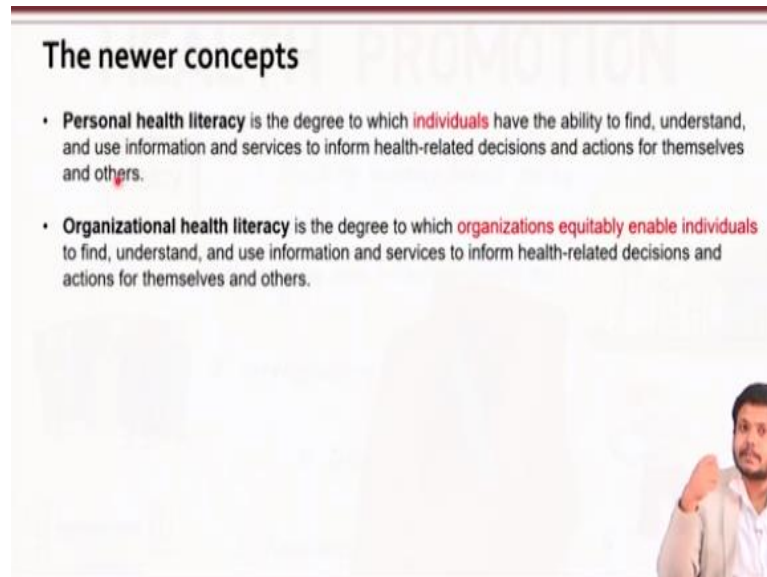
It may include certain social skills, it may include certain communication skills, and it may include certain skills to extract the information as well, I mean. Then you have the critical health literacy part, which is the ability to critically analyze information and use this to exert greater control over life events and situations.

So, in critical health literacy, it is not only about being able to critically analyze, you have to analyze each and every detail of the information provided to you. But also

having it to use to have a greater control over life events and situations. By life events and situations, it necessarily means the health-related issues. But it may go beyond health also. So, the important part here is to being able to critically analyze.

You have to analyze every little detail. It stands at the highest position of health literacy as per Nutbeam's classification.

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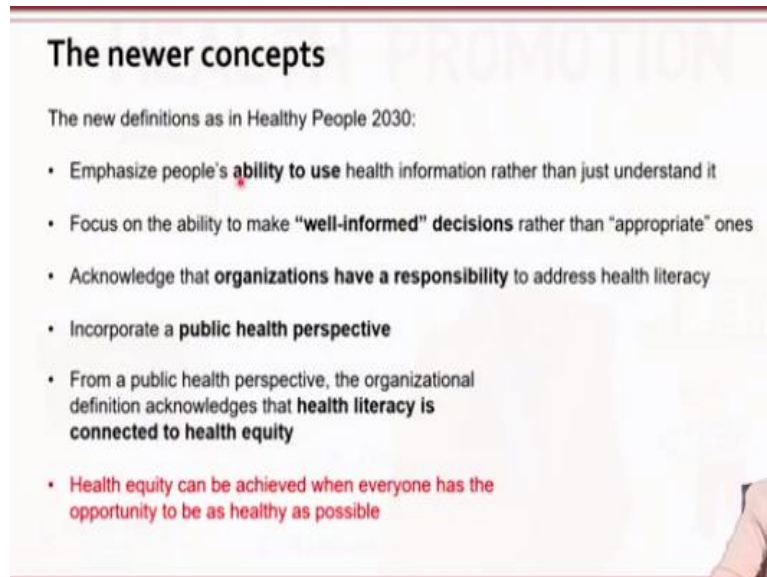
The last part we discuss will be the newer concepts that is emerging. Now with the advent or with the proposition of the Healthy People 2030 policy, the CDC in fact, has come up with these two parts like the personal health literacy component and the organizational health literacy component. Because now health literacy is not seen as only healthy literacy as a separate entity.

Now with the advent of this, all these healthy people concept and all these evolving definitions, now we have these two parts. Like one is personal, where we discuss about the individuals. And in the organizational part, we again discuss about the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals. So, in the personal health literacy part it is placing one's own health in his or her own hands.

And in the organizational health literacy part it is the organizational responsibility of improving an individual's health or in other words, improving the individual's health literacy. So, it does not specifically mean – particularly “the organization” – ... it may

be the government as a whole, it may be the society as a whole, anything which has an organizational “setting”.

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So, what happens with this new definition? It emphasizes on the people's ability to use the health information because it is not only about understanding as I have said, it is also about being able to use the information. Then well-informed decisions, because I have said that the informed decision making is an important part in health literacy and that part is coming up with more thrust now.

Then the acknowledgement that organizations have a responsibility or the overall setting where a particular individual is nested. That particular setting has a responsibility. An individual person is working in some organization, that organization also has some responsibility of health literacy for that person. Then it has a public health perspective incorporated into it. It is all-encompassing, it is broad.

And it finally acknowledges that health literacy is connected to health equity, because we were discussing that through health literacy, we can remove the barriers and we can improve the health inequity situation. So, these newer definitions, they strictly say that it is through health literacy how we can combat this health inequity, right?

So, follow the line in red. Health equity can be achieved when everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible. So, it is not about only doing, it is also about being having the opportunity, right?

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CONCLUSION

- Health literacy implies the achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions
- Health literacy is a multi-sectoral phenomenon
- Nutbeam (2000) mentioned three levels of health literacy: **functional, interactive and critical**
- Health Literacy has evolved with a **public health perspective to empower people in taking well-informed decisions**, and in the long run ensure **health equity**

So, in conclusion, we have discussed the definitions of health literacy. Now we know that having a well-informed decision is a very important concept of health literacy. The ability concept and the basic skills, they are important in health literacy. We know that health literacy is a multi-sectoral phenomena or inter-sectoral phenomena.

Then we have seen the three-level classification by Nutbeam and we know that the critical level of health literacy is more important. Next, we have understood that the newer definitions, they are more having a public health outlook, and they are more towards empowering people and they strictly address the issue that health inequity can be managed or can be addressed through this health literacy part.

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RESOURCES

- Parnell T. Health Literacy: History, Definitions, and Models [Internet]. Connect.springerpub.com. [cited 21 April 2022]. Available from: <https://connect.springerpub.com/content/book/978-0-8261-6173-4/part/part01/chapter/ch01>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. What is Health Literacy [Internet]. Health Literacy Basics. [cited 21 April 2022]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn/index.html>
- Nutbeam D. Health literacy as a public health goal: a challenge for contemporary health education and communication strategies into the 21st century. Health Promotion International. 2000;15(3):259-267.
- World Health Organization. Health Literacy: The Solid Facts [Internet]. Apps.who.int. [cited 21 April 2022]. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/128703/e96854.pdf>

So, you can go through these resources. And I hope you understand the health literacy component because it will be very interesting as we go on with our lectures. And health literacy is not only important for the individuals who are seeking health care or common people, it is also important for those who are providing the health care. So with that note.. done for this lecture. Thank you.