Native American Health Literacy and Healthcare Needs

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This study used a quantitative survey with a convenience sample (N = 28) from The Seneca Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma to determine the health literacy of a population of Native Americans as well as this population’s special healthcare needs. This study focused on the relationship between the use of traditional medicine and Western medicine with healthcare needs. Analysis revealed that younger members (19-40 years old) of the tribe were more likely to only seek Western medical treatment and have a higher health literacy, while older members (50 years and over) were more likely to seek both care from a medical professional and through traditional healing and have lower health literacy. The health literacy was determined on a set of contextual factors and correlates to the individual’s perceived health care beliefs. This study determined that for this particular tribe, health literacy was at the basic level. Specific healthcare needs that were prevalent among this population were Type 2 diabetes mellitus, obesity and liver/kidney disease. This study suggests that education and prevention tailored to the tribe’s contextual factors and health literacy will help promote better compliance to personal healthcare. Future studies are needed to analyze if such programs are in fact beneficial.