BARRIERS TO HEALTH LITERACY AMONG PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Purpose: The population with visual impairments is an estimated 285 million people worldwide and growing. Recent studies raise concern about the differences in health literacy between the visually impaired and sighted populations. The purpose of this systematic literature review is to better understand and describe existing barriers to health literacy for the visually impaired population and to discuss possible ways to overcome these barriers.

Methods: An exhaustive online search of three databases within EBSCO (e.g. CINAHL, Medline, PsycInfo) was conducted to gather peer-reviewed research discussing health literacy amongst the visually impaired population. The search yielded 37 articles, which were analyzed for factors that influence health literacy among this population.

Findings: Analysis indicated barriers surrounding six themes: (i) ineffective low vision rehabilitation (ii) communication barriers (iii) physical barriers (iv) provider influences (v) societal stigma, and (vi) individual incentive. Knowledge of these barriers can be used to shape future policy and health care provider action to improve health literacy and health outcomes among the visually impaired population.

Conclusions: It is well documented that low health literacy leads to poor health outcomes, high health costs, few self-management skills, poor ability to access the health care system, and poor quality of life. This review points to modifiable variables that could be changed in practice to improve outcomes for people with VI.

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