Health Literacy Improves with Home Visitation, Especially in Depressed Mothers

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What’s known?
Research links low literacy & depression. Both conditions are prevalent among parents participating in home visitation. Both negatively impact maternal and child health and contribute to health disparities. Still, little is known about the interactions of depression and health literacy.

What’s New?
We analyzed data from home visitation programs that aimed to improve parents’ reflective skills and examined changes over time in health literacy and surrounding family conditions. Overall, parents achieved significant improvement. Further, depressed parents made greater gains than not-depressed parents.

Hypotheses:
Depression impairs health literacy and impairs efforts to promote health literacy through home visiting.

Health Literacy: More than Reading
• Link between reading ability and outcomes is unclear.
• To increase understanding of the problem & see the range of possible responses, it is important to reconsider the meaning and measure of health literacy.
• This study takes a socio-cultural view integrating literacy studies and health behavior theory.

Maternal Health Literacy: Life Skill & Personal Asset
The cognitive & social skills that determine the motivation and ability of mothers to gain access to, understand and use information in ways that promote and maintain their health and that of their children.
• Health Literacy Skills: basic, interactive, reflective
• Enables parents to manage personal and child health & healthcare
• Can be promoted (health ed, skills development, direct assistance)
• Underlying construct estimated by contextual factors (healthcare participation, maintenance of safe environments, behaviors)

Parental Depression
• 7.5 million parents impaired annually; 15 million children at risk for lifelong health and behavioral consequences
• Triggered, exacerbated by pregnancy, parenting stress. Can persist years
• Under-recognized, undertreated
• Barrier to adult and child health services, and home visitation services

Home Visiting
• Preventive intervention to support families & child development
• 500,000 served by national networks, state systems, independents
• Expanded by Affordable Care Act

Population
• 2572 parent/child dyads who participated in enhanced home visitation designed to develop reflective skills for 6 to 36 months
• Population is low income, low education, low literacy, medically underserved
• Six sites in IN, GA, VA, CA, MT

METHODS
• Secondary analysis of AHRQ/NIH database
• Intervention study design: quasi-experimental, six sites, multiple waves of measurement, matched comparison group, 2006-2008
• One to seven measures per family over 6 to 36 months
• Life Skills Progression Instrument, Health Literacy Scales
• Examined differences in depression ratings at baseline
• Explored patterns of change in health literacy among depressed & not-depressed parents in service for 12-18 months

RESULTS
- Better depression scores consistently, positively correlated with better use of information & services (r=21-22, p<.001) and self-management of personal and child health (r=42-49, p<.001)
- Overall parents made significant improvements on indicators of health literacy (p<.001)
- Depressed parents demonstrated dramatically lower health literacy at baseline
- Depressed parents made greater gains (p<.001)

CONCLUSIONS
- Depression impairs functional health literacy
- After 12-18 months of enhanced home visitation, parents were better able to manage personal & child health and healthcare.
- Depressed parents made the greatest gains
- Depression does not impair efforts to promote health literacy through home visitation
- Home visitation may be an effective channel to address health literacy and home visitation

Future Studies
• Changing predictors of parental depression – in progress
• Impact of parental health literacy on child development – proposed

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