LUMEN ET VIRTUS

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CORRECT USE OF MEDICINES FOR ILLITERATE PATIENTS

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ABSTRACT

Abstract The use of visual communication in the health area is one of the most significant initiatives to reinforce the verbal instructions provided by the health team. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2018, approximately 8.8% of the population aged 25 and over had no education. In this context, health professionals face difficulties in medication adherence by illiterate patients. They often face additional barriers when following medical prescriptions and treatment guidelines, which can lead to health complications and an increase in hospitalization rates. Visual communication can include the use of pictograms, illustrations, and simple schemes that aid in understanding medical instructions. This approach not only facilitates treatment adherence but also promotes

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greater independence and self-confidence for patients in managing their own health. The general objective of this project was to promote adequate guidance on the use of medications for illiterate patients, aiming to improve their understanding, safety, and adherence to treatment. Specifically, the project sought to develop educational, clear and accessible visual materials, train health professionals in the use of these materials, and evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention in improving treatment adherence.

Keywords: Illiteracy. Medication. Guidance.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a fundamental right of all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, education level, or reading skills. Many patients face challenges with the correct administration of medications, especially those who use polypharmacy, due to their illiteracy condition (No, 2019).

Illiteracy is a global health problem that affects millions of people around the world. These people often encounter difficulties not only in reading and writing, but also in interpreting complex information, such as those related to medication. For illiterate patients, it is necessary to take a differentiated approach to provide clear and understandable information about their medications. This approach should take into account the diversity of languages, cultures, and educational levels among patients, ensuring that everyone receives the necessary guidance for the safe and effective use of prescribed medications (Guilherme *et al*., 2016).

Recovering the literacy capacity, aligning the learning expectations of Brazilians with those of their peers in other countries is an economic development strategy, as well as a social issue, a difficult challenge, but possible, it is a demonstration of commitment to each individual, since in the age of knowledge, the full exercise of citizenship and personal satisfaction depend on effective schooling (BRASIL, 2020).

In view of this, and considering that all individuals have the right to receive adequate information about their health and correct use of medicines, regardless of their literacy level, the relevance of this Health Education project aimed at illiterate patients in a Basic Health Unit (BHU) in a municipality in the Midwest of Santa Catarina was perceived.

METHODOLOGY

It is a project with an explanatory, observational and descriptive purpose. The target population was illiterate patients, users of polypharmacy or not, and continuous use of medications or not, registered at the UBS. The proposal was initially presented to the team responsible for dispensing the medicines. The initiative aimed to facilitate adherence to drug treatment through simple and accessible guidance. When receiving their medications, the patients were instructed by health professionals, using the medication separator box (Image 1), made for this purpose. Appropriate and playful materials were used through visual methods, illustrations and symbols, with distinct colors and specific symbols for the times (breakfast, lunch and dinner) instead of relying exclusively on writing, thus ensuring that patients understood the importance of regularity and dosage in the use of medications, promoting the safety and efficacy of the treatment.

The actions took place in a group at the UBS, and it was not necessary to go through the Ethics Committee. All ethical precepts were respected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the observation of the difficulties faced by illiterate patients at the UBS when trying to understand and correctly use their medications, especially with regard to dosage and location. Lack of clear and simple-to-understand guidelines can lead to dosing errors, leading to underdosing and overdosing. Therefore, it is important to provide these patients with specific and simple-to-understand guidance to ensure that they can make informed decisions about their health and receive appropriate treatment.

As the project progressed, a significant impact was noted on the lives of the patients who were cared for and guided through visible materials and overcome from the difficulties identified.

These resources are designed to convey information about medicines in a clear and understandable way, using visual language, symbols, and colors.

Through these adapted strategies and approaches, it was possible to offer illiterate patients the necessary guidance for the safe and effective use of medications, ensuring that they received adequate care for their health, regardless of their reading and writing ability. This initiative contributed to more effective and safer health care, promoting the autonomy and well-being of these patients.

Finally, the present project highlighted the importance of a patient-centered approach, with a holistic view, where inclusion is important to ensure access and comprehensiveness of care, as a guarantee of the principles of the Unified Health System - SUS (BRASIL, 1990).

Through initiatives like this, it is possible to transform the difficulties of illiterate patients into effective and promising alternatives, ensuring a more humanized and accessible health environment for all.

Image1 :Medicine Separator BoxSource: the authors 2024



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The project contributed to more effective and safer health care for illiterate patients participating in the proposal. With the use of visual and accessible materials, it was possible to provide clear and understandable guidance, contributing to the reduction of errors in the administration of medications, such as underdosing and overdosing, directly resulting in a significant improvement in the quality of life of patients.

In addition, by training these patients with the necessary knowledge for the correct use of their medications, inclusion is promoted, making them more co-responsible for the outcome of the treatment. This approach not only increases the safety of drug treatment, but also reinforces patients' autonomy, allowing them to feel more confident and able to manage their own health.

Another important aspect is the creation of a more inclusive health environment, where literacy barriers do not prevent access to quality health care. Adapting communication and education strategies to meet the specific needs of illiterate patients demonstrates a commitment to equity and justice in health care delivery.

In the long term, it is hoped that this project will serve as a model for other Basic Health Units, encouraging the implementation of similar practices in different contexts. With this, we can expand the reach of this initiative, benefiting a greater number of patients and promoting a more inclusive and effective health system.

In short, the project not only improves the quality of life of illiterate patients, but also promotes safer, more inclusive and responsible health care, where everyone, regardless of their reading and writing ability, has the opportunity to achieve positive results in their treatments.

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