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PICTOGRAMS: A DOCTOR-PATIENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Contextualization of the problem: The comprehensibility of medical information should be improved in a population with low functional health literacy, expanding the meaning of information and providing users of the Unified Health System (SUS) with an improvement in their quality of life, based on the dissemination of knowledge. As a strategy to facilitate the acquiescence of health care, good options are the graphic resources called Pictograms, defined as communication instruments that represent, in a simplified way, an idea, object, action or specific concept, composed of simple and easily recognizable visual elements, allowing the transmission of information quickly and universally. Objective: To analyze the use of pictograms as a communication tool between physicians and patients in Primary Health Care (PHC), aiming to improve the understanding of medical guidelines and promote a more humanized, accessible and inclusive care. Activities developed: Integrative Literature Review (RIL) of the descriptive and qualitative type, by direct search on digital platforms, where articles were collected and selected in the period from 2019 to 2024. Results achieved: One of the essential pillars of clinical practice is the doctor-patient relationship, and it is essential to develop a bond that includes technical, human and ethical aspects capable of offering holistic, individual-centered care. To this end, communication skills training, recognized as a core competency, must be improved. The clear visualization of medical information through pictograms empowers patients to actively participate in their health-disease process and strengthens the doctor-patient relationship, promoting personalized and efficient care. A continuous effort is needed to improve these tools, ensuring that they meet the emerging needs of patients and are efficiently integrated into health systems, aiming to maximize the positive impact of these resources on clinical practice, promoting inclusive and qualified care.

Keywords: Health Literacy, Doctor-Patient Relationship, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The Doctor-Patient Relationship (PMR) is defined by the meeting of two individuals, marked by a health-disease process, in which the first offers a service for the biopsychosocial well-being of the other, intermediated by communication between peers or by a third party, in case there is any communication barrier. (Campos, 2021).

Communication between doctor and patient must happen naturally, so Communication Skills (HC) converge in the context of Primary Health Care (PHC), as this is the gateway for users of the Unified Health System (SUS), in which the individual is welcomed and brings all their health demands. In the Basic Health Unit (UBS) there is the first contact between the doctor, the patient and the multidisciplinary team, therefore, the understanding and clarity of the information transmitted and prescriptions made directly influence the adherence to treatment by patients (Campos, 2021).

In Brazil, more than 10 million people over 15 years of age are illiterate. This fact reveals the low educational level of the population, portraying a reality that goes beyond access to writing, also involving the acquisition of other intellectual skills (Braga; Mazzeu, 2017).

In this context, literacy is the result of the process of learning to read and write. Functional literacy encompasses skills that allow the individual to develop in specific activities and in daily life (Passamai; Sampaio, 2012).

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies functional literacy as one of the social determinants of health, with prominence in the quality of life of the population because it is considered fundamental in the process of self-care. In this way, it allows the individual to be empowered and aware of healthy and positive choices related to their lives, according to the concept of health promotion defined in the Ottawa Charter (1986), with regard to the training of the community to act to improve the quality of life, enabling the control of people and the community over the health-disease and well-being process (Martins; Sampaio, 2022).

This situation is not restricted to the individual's education, given the level of formal education, as there is not always clarity in medical guidelines regarding the disease and care (Passamai; Sampaio, 2012). Thus, related barriers in relation to doctor-patient communication are highlighted that compromise understanding for effective and qualified patient treatment, considering that patient adherence is one of the pillars of health care (Granito; Marques, 2021; Neto et al., 2019).

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The comprehensibility of medical information should be improved in a population with low functional health literacy, expanding the meaning of information and providing users of the Unified Health System (SUS) with an improvement in their quality of life, based on the dissemination of knowledge (Feitosa, 2022).

There is a need for reliable and accessible health information, adapted to the particularities and circumstances of each one, exploring and characterizing the principle of integrality of the SUS, related to the integral, and not partial, condition of understanding the human being and their needs (Martins; Sampaio, 2022).

As a strategy to facilitate the acquiescence of health care, good options are the graphic resources called Pictograms, defined as communication instruments that represent, in a simplified way, a specific idea, object, action or concept. It is composed of simple and easily recognizable visual elements, allowing you to convey information quickly and universally. These can cover a wide variety of health topics, such as medication usage instructions, dosage indications, hazard warnings, safety precautions, hygiene care, first aid guidelines, and more, and are designed to be easily recognized and understood by different audiences, including patients, healthcare professionals, and lay people (Granite; Marques, 2021).

This method, when implemented correctly, is beneficial to the user, the professional/team and the health system, being particularly useful for people with visual impairment and/or low functional literacy, since they offer an alternative form of communication that is more easily understood by these populations. In addition, they can also be useful for children and the elderly, who may face challenges in reading written information. It is, therefore, a strategy that helps overcome language barriers, reinforces memorization, promotes cultural inclusion, and can be adapted to meet the ever-evolving needs of healthcare. All this from a perspective that respects and encourages diversity, equality, inclusion and accessibility. In addition, clear understanding of treatment instructions is essential for patient compliance. Pictograms can help convey information in a concise and visually appealing way, which can increase the likelihood that patients will correctly follow medication, diet, exercise, postoperative care, among other aspects of treatment (Neto et al., 2019; Feitosa, 2022).

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JUSTIFICATION

The use of pictograms in doctor-patient communication in a context of increasing complexity in health care are visual representations that facilitate the understanding of medical information, especially for patients with different levels of education and linguistic and communicative skills. The literature shows that visual communication can improve treatment adherence, reduce medication errors, and promote a better understanding of medical guidelines.

In a scenario where public health faces challenges such as health literacy, pictograms present themselves as an inclusive and effective strategy. This study aims to analyze the use of pictograms as a tool for doctor-patient communication, contributing to the strengthening of the relationship between both, in addition to promoting the autonomy and empowerment of the individual in their health decisions, as well as a more humanized and effective care.

Pictograms convey information about medications in an understandable way, making it easier for the patient to understand. In a comparative analysis, it is notable that a traditional prescription, often replete with technical terms, may be less effective in communicating the instructions needed for proper treatment. On the other hand, the inclusion of pictograms can significantly increase the clarity and retention of information by patients (Feitosa, 2020).

The study is justified in the understanding that effective communication is fundamental for the success of medical interventions and for the empowerment of patients in self-care. Anvisa's Resolution RDC No. 67 (2007) reinforces this idea by establishing that the readability of medical prescriptions must be evaluated, preventing possible errors of interpretation that may compromise the health of patients. Therefore, the adoption of pictograms not only aligns with regulatory guidelines, but can represent a significant advance in medical practice, improving the interaction between healthcare professionals and patients, as well as promoting an inclusive and understandable approach in healthcare administration.

OBJECTIVE

To analyze the use of pictograms as a communication tool between physicians and patients in Primary Health Care (PHC), aiming to improve the understanding of medical guidelines and promote a more humanized, accessible and inclusive care.

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METHODOLOGY

The present study was developed through a qualitative methodological approach, with a descriptive and explanatory character, through the Integrative Literature Review (RIL) by direct search on digital platforms such as: Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS), the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (BIREME), the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), PubMed, an open-access resource that is developed and maintained by NCBI, at the NLM *(U.S. National Library of Medicine*), located at the *National Institutes of* Health (NIH) and at Scopus – Periodicals of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), where articles were collected and selected from the descriptors: "Health Literacy; Doctor-Patient Relationship; Diversity, Equality, Inclusion and Accessibility.

The guidelines for the elaboration of the integrative literature review were defined by 6 stages:

1. elaboration of guiding research;
2. inclusion and exclusion criteria;
3. search for information on specific platforms;
4. data collection;
5. evaluation of studies suitable for review;
6. presentation of the review.

The inclusion criteria were: complete articles, published from 2019 to 2024, published in Portuguese and Spanish. In addition, the period chosen was due to innovations in the field of research related to pictograms: a doctor-patient communication strategy. However, incomplete articles and those that did not involve the defined theme were excluded.

Thus, a flowchart was established as a form of information collection strategy in order to detail the fundamental evidence for the development of the work.

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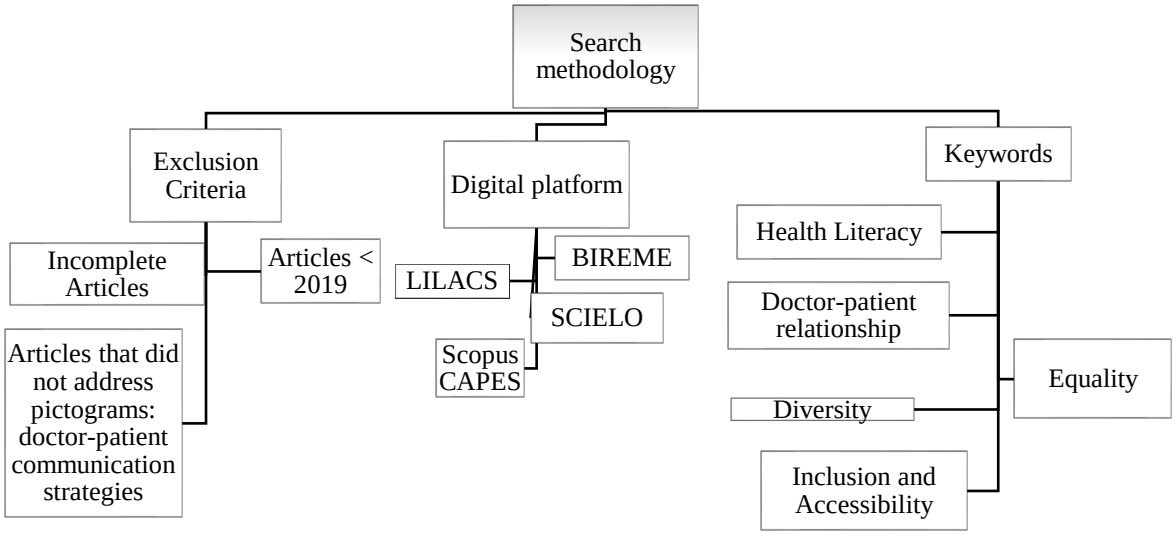
Flowchart 1 – Search Strategy. Teresópolis-RJ, Brazil, 2024.



Source: Prepared by the author.

For the selection of sources, the PICO strategy was used, as shown in the table below:

Table 1 – Presentation of the PICO Methodology. Teresópolis – RJ, Brazil. 2024.

P	**Population**	Patients with low health literacy; Patients with language barriers; Elderly patients; Patients with cognitive or learning disabilities; Paediatric patients.
I	**Interest/** Intervention	Medical prescriptions.
C	**Comparison/** Context	Doctor-patient communication (verbal communication, written text, non-pictographic visual materials, multimedia).
Or	**Desfecho/** *Outcome*	Understanding of medical instructions; Treatment adherence.

Source: Prepared by the author (2024).

In the selection of articles, the types of study systematic review with meta-analysis and field research were used. A total of 26 articles were obtained, of which 11 were included in this review, since they met the objective of the research, with the purpose of analyzing the use of pictograms as a communication tool between physicians and patients in Primary Health Care (PHC) to improve the understanding of medical guidelines and promote a more humanized care, accessible and inclusive.

Articles not pertinent to the theme were excluded after screening the title and abstract, and then screening the full text and deleting repeated texts.

According to Sousa, Oliveira and Alves (2021), bibliographic research aims to improve knowledge through scientific investigation, being a survey or review of published

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works on the theory and that guides the researcher who will analyze the works on the subject.

The selection of a qualitative method is based on the specific characteristics it has, which allows it to present an approximate view of the reality being studied. Köche (2009) defines bibliographic research as "indispensable to any type of research", because in it the researcher explores and analyzes the main theories and existing contributions on the subject.

RESULTS

Table 2 - Distribution of selected articles on pictograms as a communication tool between physicians and patients. Teresópolis, RJ, Brazil. 2024.

TITLE	AUTHOR/YEAR	JOURNAL/DATABASE	OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH
The impacts of inadequate communication on the doctor-patient relationship	Defante, et al., 2024	Brazilian Journal of Medical Education Scielo	To evaluate the impacts of inadequate communication on the doctor-patient relationship.
Use of pictograms as a pharmaceutical strategy for patient guidance	Tenório et al., 2024	Electronic Journal Health Collection	To elucidate the use of pictograms in health and the facilitation of communication with the patient in the pharmaceutical field.
Pictograms for the rational use of medicines (URM): population interpretations and descriptions of artificial intelligences.	Neto et al., 2023	Sistemoteca - UFCG library system	Verify the interpretation of pictograms by users and evaluate the potential for improvement of this resource using Artificial Intelligence (AI).
Disparities in communication and counseling between patient and resident physician: a qualitative exploratory multiperspective study.	Merchant et al., 2023	*PLoS One* PubMed	Explore potential biases and disparities in patient-resident communication, which may influence the quality of patient care.
Humanization of medical prescription: use of pictograms in medical prescription as a way to combat poor therapeutic adherence	Jurdi et al., 2023	*Brazilian Congress of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Knowledge*	To report the experience of producing information and communication technology in health, in the form of a workshop, aiming to inform and guide on the use of pictograms in medical prescriptions.
Health communication and health promotion: contributions and challenges, from the perspective of the professionals of the Family Health Strategy.	Pimentel et al., 2022	Physis: Journal of Collective Health Scielo	It emphasizes the need for HC not only for the physician, but for the entire primary care team. Focused on the patient but also among the team members.

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Pictographic prescription: a strategy that facilitates adherence to pharmacological treatment applied in the emergency care unit.	Granito et al., 2021	Jopic Magazine	To know the use of pictograms in the health area and its positive and negative points.
Pictograms: strategies to help the elderly in the correct use of medications	Rocha et al,. 2021	Brazilian Journal of Development	To investigate the effectiveness of the use of pictographs and playful activities in understanding and facilitating the use of drugs for the elderly.
Implementation of pictograms to improve therapeutic adherence in patients with low levels of education: an intervention project in primary care	Gregório et al., 2021	Brazilian Journal of Developmen	To allow a greater understanding of the therapeutic prescription in patients with a low level of education, consequently seeking greater autonomy and better therapeutic adherence.
Doctor-patient relationship in Primary Health Care.	De Oliveira et al., 2020	Research, Society and Development Scopus	To analyze the doctor-patient relationship in primary health care.
Impact of Communication Skills Training and Medical Record on the Practice of the Clinical Method of Integral Care to the Person.	Moura et al., 2019	Brazilian Journal of Medical Education Scielo	To assess the impact of communication skills training on the practice of the clinical method of whole-person care, with or without the use of a specific record for care.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

DISCUSSION

COMMUNICATION, DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP AND HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE HUMANIZATION OF CARE

Enunciation is accomplished through gradual dialogue, in which experiences influence meanings. Language, shaped by the social context and individual experiences, facilitates mutual understanding and exerts power in the communicative process, socially valuing the subject. The dissimilarity between health professionals and assisted individuals can create vertical communication, generating distancing and effective communication improves the quality of care by allowing an adequate exchange of information. (Defante, et al., 2024).

The doctor-patient relationship is fundamental to clinical practice and is based on the concept of bond, covering technical, human and ethical aspects. The person-centered approach focuses on patients' health and experiences, considering their needs and values, and understanding them as a whole, resulting in increased satisfaction, reduced anxiety and fear, and improved treatment adherence. Such construction requires understanding, trust, and empathy, essential elements for clear and collaborative communication that benefits the patient's health. The quality of care often does not correspond to the patients'

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perception, suggesting the need for greater humanization and empathy in medical practice. (De Oliveira et al., 2020)

Communication between doctor and patient must perpetuate a holistic view, considering the patient in his or her totality and context. Communication skills training, recognized as a core competency since the 1990s, has been improved in medical schools through a variety of strategies, including record models that combine biomedical and person-centered aspects and favor clinical practice. (Moura et al., 2019)

Developing communicative skills helps in the construction of therapeutic relationships, exchange of relevant information and pertinent decisions in the care plan. Interpersonal skills, such as the ability to listen and offer emotional support, are essential to establish a relationship of trust and respect, but, in addition, policies and training that improve the contact and results of health system users are essential to improve the quality of care and patient outcomes. (Merchant et al., 2023)

PICTOGRAMS IN CARE AND THERAPEUTIC ADHERENCE IN HEALTH CARE

In the midst of the complexity of care and the desirable problem-solving capacity in Primary Health Care (PHC), the proposal for welcoming the SUS highlights the importance of communication between workers and users to create problem-solving services and promote autonomy. Health education complements this approach by developing critical awareness and facilitating decision-making. With effective communication, there is an increase in the quality of individual and community life, overcoming emotional and mental problems and promoting autonomy and self-care. (Pimentel et al., 2022)

Literacy is the result of learning to read and write, and in Brazil, many individuals, especially the most needy, have only functional literacy, limited to specific actions. In clinical practice, understanding pharmacotherapy is crucial for treatment adherence and for avoiding errors in medication administration. Studies indicate that factors such as low financial condition, low level of education, forgetting medications, and lack of knowledge about the disease and the therapeutic regimen are the main determinants for non-adherence to drug treatment. (Jurdi et al., 2023)

Safety in the use of medicines depends on the quality of care provided to the patient, which includes providing clear information about the pathology, the prescribed medications, their expected and adverse effects, and the importance of complying with the medical prescription, especially in the context of primary health care (PHC), the gateway for users of

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the Unified Health System. The patient's ability to understand and process this information is essential for making informed decisions and practicing proper self-care. (Gregório et al., 2021)

Communication failures, such as complex language, disorganized information, and illegible handwriting, can lead to inadequate adherence to treatment. It is in this context that pictograms show a significant innovation in health communication, providing a dialogue capable of overcoming traditional language and literacy barriers and making information universally accessible. (Rocha et al,. 2021)

Pictograms are graphical representations of ideas, words, or concepts. Its use can facilitate the understanding of medical instructions and increase adherence to prescribed treatments, especially in places where functional health literacy varies. By integrating such a strategy into clinical practice, the promotion of more accessible, inclusive, and effective health is evident (Tenório et al., 2024)

The clear visualization of medical information through pictograms empowers patients to actively participate in their health-disease process and strengthens the doctor-patient relationship, promoting more personalized, efficient, and holistic care. (Granito et al., 2021)

The effectiveness of pictograms depends on their clarity and simplicity, and they must represent a single idea unequivocally. They must cater to cognitive characteristics such as familiarity, concreteness, and simplicity to ensure that the message is easily understood. The difficulties in interpreting some pictograms highlight a demand for improvement, and it is necessary for integration in health systems to explore new technologies and methodologies to improve their configuration and application, adapting them to emerging needs, to maximize their impact on practice. (Neto et al., 2023)

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the use of pictograms as a communication tool between physicians and patients in Primary Health Care (PHC), aiming to improve the understanding of medical guidelines and promote a more humanized, accessible, and inclusive care, showed that the effective interaction between physicians and patients must be shaped in order to improve the quality of care and ensure an adequate exchange of information. In PHC, language is influenced by the social context and individual experiences, and it is necessary to facilitate mutual understanding and mitigate the social distance generated by vertical communication.

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One of the essential pillars of clinical practice is the doctor-patient relationship for the development of a bond that includes technical, human and ethical aspects capable of offering holistic, individual-centered care. To this end, communication skills training, recognized as a core competency, must be improved.

For patients with low functional literacy, people with disabilities, the elderly and children accompanied by their legal guardians, pictograms serve as a tool to meet their needs, as they make it accessible to understand health guidelines, promoting the more active participation of these groups in the course of treatment.

The visual clarity offered is capable of simplifying the understanding of medical instructions, culminating in greater adherence to prescribed treatments. However, the effectiveness of these visuals depends on their clarity and simplicity. A continuous effort is needed to improve these tools, ensuring that they meet the emerging needs of patients and are efficiently integrated into health systems, aiming to maximize the positive impact of these resources on clinical practice, by promoting inclusive care.

Communication is a bridge that unites people. Health pictograms work as a universal way to transmit complex health information, facilitating understanding between doctors and patients, promoting human, clear and accessible interaction, essential in Primary Health Care.

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