

TO EXPLORE THE ROLE OF HEALTH LITERACY IN ENABLING GREATER PATIENT INVOLVEMENT IN WOUND MANAGEMENT

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Health literacy is a relatively new term that broadly covers an individual's ability to make sound health decisions in the context of their everyday life. Low health literacy will compromise an individual's ability to understand their health needs and to find their way through complex healthcare systems, with profound consequences for their health. People with low health literacy often have poorer health status, are less likely to make healthy living choices, experience higher rates of hospitalisation and emergency admissions. At one time the approach to this area focused on an individual's lack of knowledge and skills regarding health issues. It is now recognised that health literacy is also a 'systems issue', which reflects the complexity of both health information and the health care system. For example, in the UK, around one in five adults cannot read or understand simple instructions or labels such as those found on medicine bottles. Understanding and improving health literacy should be a key objective for anyone who communicates with the public in any way about their health, including wound management. It is now recognised that health inequalities arise from a combination of socio-economic factors experienced by many people living in areas of multiple deprivation. Education, employment, housing, level of income, environment as well as ethnicity and gender can impact on an individual's ability to both understand and act on health messages in order to work as partners in a health setting.