

Populations with high education levels and medication adherence

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Dear Editor,

I read the article “The impact of health literacy in adherence to medications in a population with acute lumbar pain: a cross-sectional study” by Amorim & Santos [1] with great interest. The authors studied 249 patients with acute lumbar pain in Portugal. The sample had high levels of health literacy (71.5%) and high levels of education (74.5% with superior education), and one would generally expect a higher likelihood of adherence to medication. In fact, the study by Amorim & Santos revealed a noteworthy adherence rate of 84.4% within the sample [1]. The authors also noted that taking pain relief drugs was associated with the impact of pain but not with literacy [1]. However, it is important to note that while high health literacy and education levels can contribute positively to medication adherence [2], the severity of the pain can influence this, as shown by Amorim and Santos [1]. Considering that acute pain typically lasts for a short duration, the treatment plan associated with this is also brief, and the patient’s understanding of the treatment instructions and management of possible side effects may be simple and straightforward. But what about patients’ health literacy and medication adherence in chronic conditions with greater complexity? In the case of chronic conditions that persist over an extended period of time, health literacy can become even more important, as patients need to understand their condition(s) and potential treatment options, which, in the case of chronic conditions, will frequently include long-term medication use, lifestyle modifications, non-pharmacological therapies

and self-management strategies. The impact of health literacy on medication adherence may be more pronounced in cases of chronic conditions due to the complexity and duration of their treatment plans [3]. As previously stated, medication adherence for acute pain may be influenced by its severity in a highly educated sample. Nonetheless, adherence can still be influenced by other factors, particularly in chronic conditions, as observed in a recent study performed by Rosendo-Silva et al. [4] in a highly educated sample of hypertensive patients in Portugal. Rosendo-Silva et al. have identified some factors that influence medication adherence in this chronic condition: patient beliefs (forgetfulness and the fear of overdose), family support (management of symptoms and lifestyle change) and access to healthcare professionals (symptoms and management of side effects) [4]. The ability to understand the necessity of long-term medication use and treatment instructions, to cope with potential side effects (patients’ problem-solving skills and self-efficacy) and to follow the treatment plan constantly over time will influence medication adherence for chronic conditions. In both presented scenarios, healthcare providers should deliver clear and accessible information regarding the conditions (whether acute, chronic or acute-on-chronic) and the associated treatment plans, all aimed at fostering effective medication adherence. Nonetheless, these studies’ findings need to be analysed in the context of the specific populations being examined and the factors that might individually influence medication adherence in these groups.

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