

EMPOWER (Project)

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Background

International studies show the far ranging effects of health literacy on population health. Patients with low literacy have for example more ED visits, more and longer hospital stays, higher costs, worse self-care behavior and self-management, worse outcomes in chronic care and less utilization of preventive offers. Health care systems have to develop measures to support patients with low literacy¹. Basically, there are two levers: the individual patient and the health care organizations / system as a whole. Transforming the health care system towards a more health literacy friendly system is of eminent importance. Currently, there are several international models which aim to make organizations health literate and patient centered². One means of achieving the goal is to adapt processes and care structures to serve patients with low health literacy levels³. Especially in primary care this is of great importance and primary care is viewed as an adequate setting to implement health literacy responsive structures⁴. As a first step towards a more health literacy responsive primary care setting, the EMPOWER project seeks to identify the status quo of the health literacy friendliness of primary care practices in Germany.

Goals of the project

- Survey of chronically ill patients' perspective regarding the health literacy responsiveness of primary care practices.
- Comparison of the health literacy of chronically ill patients as measured by international validated questionnaires with the evaluation of the patients' health literacy by their primary care physician.
- Survey of the status quo of preventive measures in primary care. To do so certain measures will be analyzed (i.e. smoking cessation)
- Drafting and distribution of recommendations to improve the health literacy responsiveness of primary care practices in Germany



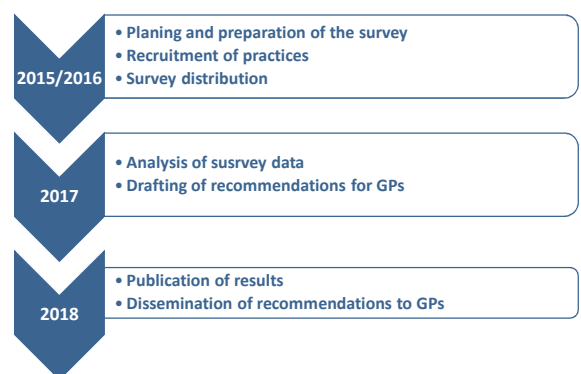
Attributes of a health literacy friendly health care organization

Methods

In a cross sectional study 800 chronically ill patients and their primary care physicians will be surveyed in NorthRhine-Westfalia (NRW). In the Cologne area a random sample of 50 practices will be recruited consecutively. Patients are recruited in the practices through the physicians. Inclusion criteria are German speaking, no cognitive impairment, age between 18 and 75 years, at least one chronic disease and one primary care visit within the last 12 months prior to the survey.

Chronically ill are targeted due to their frequent utilization of the health care services and their familiarity with the care structures and processes.

Also, for this population a health literacy friendly environment is of great importance⁵.



timetable of the EMPOWER project

Current state

Currently we are recruiting practices and surveying chronically ill patients and their GPs in the area of Cologne. Questionnaires include items to the health literacy responsiveness of the primary care practice. Patients are surveyed regarding their health literacy skills and their experiences regarding the health literacy responsiveness of the primary care setting. The GPs are surveyed with respect to the health literacy responsiveness of their practice and they are asked to judge the health literacy of their individual patients. Up to now we recruited **6 practices** with altogether **9 participating GPs**. We could recruit **120 chronically ill patients**. We plan to recruit 800 patients to have a sufficient number to generate recommendations for primary care.

Literature:

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