

Health

INTRODUCTION

Health and numeracy intersect in several key ways, highlighting important issues that impact individuals and communities. Addressing these key issues at the intersection of health and numeracy is essential for promoting better health outcomes and ensuring equitable access to healthcare resources.

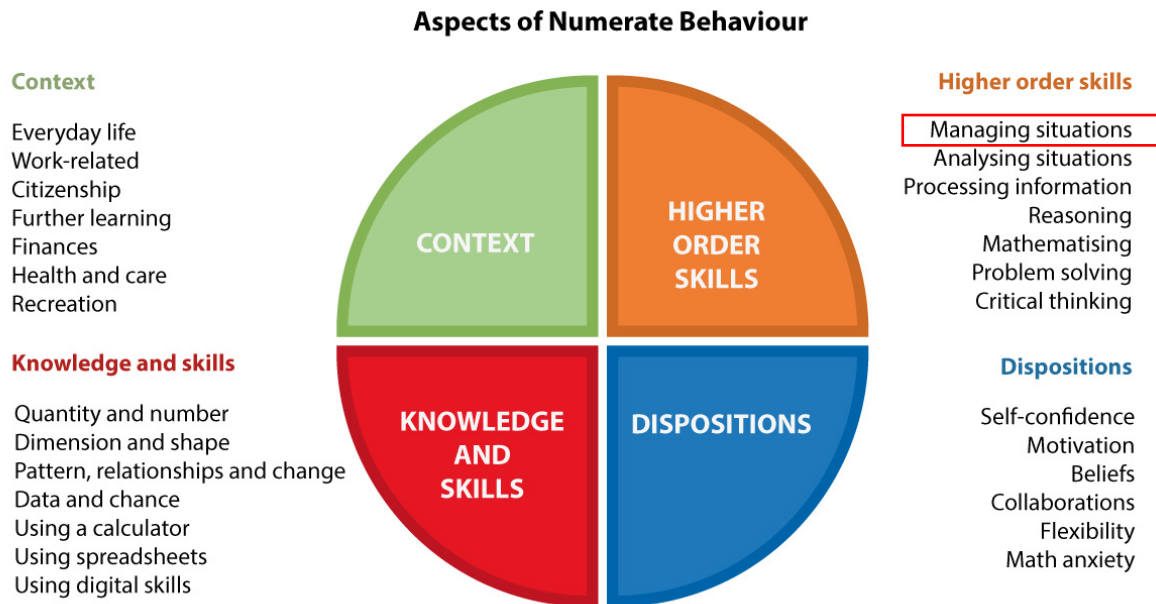
KEY ISSUES

At the intersection of health and numeracy are the following key issues:

- **Medication management:** Numeracy skills are crucial for accurately dosing and administering medication, as errors can have serious health consequences.
- **Treatment adherence:** Numeracy influences a patient's ability to follow treatment plans and understand the importance of medication adherence.
- **Health literacy:** Understanding numerical information in health materials, such as interpreting nutrition labels or medical test results, is essential for making informed health decisions.
- **Financial burdens:** Health costs often involve complex numerical calculations, and individuals with low numeracy skills may struggle to manage healthcare expenses.
- **Risk Assessment:** Numeracy is vital for evaluating health risks, such as understanding statistics related to disease prevalence or vaccine effectiveness.
- **Healthcare access:** Limited numeracy can hinder one's ability to navigate the healthcare system, making it harder to access necessary care and services.
- **Health Promotion:** Numeracy is crucial for comprehending health promotion campaigns and understanding the quantitative benefits of healthy lifestyle choices.
- **Data interpretation:** Analyzing health data, like tracking vital signs or monitoring chronic conditions, requires numeracy skills for accurate interpretation.
- **Health disparities:** Numeracy disparities can exacerbate existing health disparities, as individuals with lower numeracy may struggle to advocate for their health needs.



RELATION TO CENF



SUGGESTIONS FOR PD MEETINGS

1. Group discussion

Discuss personal experiences with the health system and have the listeners try to find out when numeracy issues are involved. Try to relate the experiences with the key issues mentioned on page 1.

2. Patient Information Leaflet

Collect package leaflets on medications (also called: Patient Information Leaflet). Select from them specific issues, for instance the risk on side effects and percentages or fractions. Or the prescribed dosages. Does everyone has the same mental picture when reading such information.

Alternative: Group study of medical information, for instance from medication package leaflets or information leaflets from the physician's office or the hospital. Highlight where the numeracy issues are.

Alternative: Discuss the articles of Mühlbauer *e.a.* (2018): *Alternative package leaflets improve people's understanding of drug side effects*, and Schwappach *e.a.* (2011) *Is less more? Patients' preferences for drug information leaflets*.

Activity: Think, Pair, Share.





3. *Issues with medical information*

Discuss the following issue on providing medical information

Challenges for providers of patient information

Providers of patient information often have a broad audience and face the problem that people have different preferences regarding the need and use of risk estimates. The meaning that is ascribed to such information varies greatly. While some express a clear need for risk estimates, others are confused by numbers and prefer to make decisions based on other types of information. Different preferences imply that using a combined verbal and numerical format may be the best compromise to suit various needs. This is also reflected in the current European Commission Guideline on readability from 2009 as well as the current EU template for patient leaflets (see below). Providing different information for different groups according to their preferences would be an option, but it may be difficult to direct patients to the information that best suits their needs. Unfortunately, data on adverse effects are often poorly reported in trials and systematic reviews, which complicates the issue. Furthermore, there might still be a role for verbal terms in written information, for example for people with difficulties in understanding numbers, or when large amounts of numbers make information too difficult to comprehend. It is difficult to draw a clear recommendation for providers of patient information as it is unlikely that there is a one-size-fits-all approach. This will depend on many other factors such as the context and the target group of the information.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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