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INTRODUCTION OF THE REALM-R (SA) AS A HEALTH LITERACY ASSESSMENT TOOL

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Low literacy can be described as the inability to read, write and use numbers effectively. In South Africa, one in six people are functionally illiterate. Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and act on healthcare information. The impact of low literacy of patients in primary care clinics is that patients may have difficulty in understanding health care instructions as well as making appropriate health care decisions. Most health care professionals are not aware of their patients' low literacy levels. The REALM-R (SA) is a health literacy assessment instrument that was adapted and validated for South African use and assesses patient's health literacy levels. The REALM-R (SA) is a quick, user friendly tool that can be administered in 2-3 minutes in a busy primary care clinic. Patients are required to read down a list of eight medical terms commonly used ranging in difficulty and complexity. A final score out of eight gives an indication of the patient's health literacy level in relation to school grades. A cut-off point for the REALM-R (SA) was established as 6 out of 8, with those scoring 6 and less considered to have low health literacy levels. Determining the patient's health literacy level can assist in giving health education at the level of the patient's understanding and in turn combating adverse health outcomes.

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