In an effort to enhance the content and application of the health literacy curriculum in pre-doctoral dental education at TUSDM, the Health Literacy Intensive was developed, a year-long health literacy curriculum for first- and second-year pre-doctoral dental students.

Health literacy encompasses many facets of health status and healthcare delivery, including individual (such as the patient, provider, caregiver, etc.) and systems factors. Health literacy education targeted towards health professionals-in-training is crucial for the development of a competent, well-rounded oral healthcare workforce.

Evaluation of the pre-doctoral health literacy curriculum at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine (TUSDM) revealed the limitations and insufficiencies in the didactic nature in which future oral healthcare providers are taught. Ideally, the training of future dental providers must reflect the dynamic nature of health literacy across multiple levels.

Goals and Objectives

- To understand the role of health literacy in relation to oral health and the healthcare system
- To appreciate the intersection of language, culture, and literacy
- To understand the value of effective communication with diverse populations in oral health education and practice

Monthly Thematic Topics

1. Months 1 & 2: History of health literacy and scope of the field: Strengths and limitations
2. Month 3: Plain Language and Numeracy
3. Month 4: Oral Health Promotion and Consumer Oral Health
4. Month 5: Literacy and Culture: CLAS Standards
5. Months 6: Adult Education and Health Literacy
6. Month 7: Use of Interpreters in the Clinical Setting

Assignment: Tracking Oral Health Messages

Figure 1A & 1B: Initial Draft of Tracking Oral Health Messages. Students discover oral health related advertisements in the media and critically evaluate the effectiveness of the message being presented.

Assignment: Consumer Oral Health Material Development

Figure 2: Initial Draft of Consumer Oral Health Material. Students create fact sheets and brochures to practice the development and content review of chairside and community educational materials.

Assignment: Plain Language Thesaurus

Figure 3: Initial Draft of Plain Language Thesaurus. Students contribute to the development of a plain language thesaurus to be shared with the TUSDM community.

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Implications for Practice

As TUSDM strives to become a health literate organization, the integration of the Health Literacy Intensive course will facilitate an ongoing, systematic implementation of the best health literacy practices at the organizational level. This intensive goes beyond the traditional national curriculum of dental students. By the time students enter clinic, they will have enhanced communication skills, a broader understanding of the healthcare system, and comprehend the implications of health literacy on oral health. Once students graduate, they will be able to identify health literacy concerns in their practice and work to achieve holistic dental care.

Assessment

1. Survey measuring change in knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported confidence of health literacy and related skills in course participants compared to first- and second-year predoctoral students in traditional dental curriculum.
2. Peer assessment of course assignments