

Letter to Editor

Oral Health Literacy a Vital Determinant of Oral Health

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Healthy living in 21st century needs variety of abilities and competencies, essentially literacy skill [1]. Literacy represents a constellation of skills including reading, writing, listening, basic mathematical calculation (numeracy), and speech comprehension (communication). Integrating the multidimensional definition of literacy to the health context emerged the concept of health literacy [2]. Interest on health literacy has grown over the last two decades. Parker, et al. [3] determined basically health literacy as the ability to apply literacy skills to health-related issues such as prescriptions, appointment cards, and medicine labels.

Adapted from health literacy background, the most common definition of oral health literacy is “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic oral health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions” [4]. This definition attends to functional literacy related to oral health, encompassing act on oral health information, navigate

the health care system, and active communication with oral health professionals. Oral health literacy skills are critical to decrease oral health disparities and promote oral health [5].

Current research, however, reveals the relation between oral health literacy and dental service utilization, oral health knowledge, and oral self-care behaviour [6,7]. Lower caregivers’ oral health literacy was also associated with lower knowledge, poor oral health behaviour, and worse caregiver-reported oral health status among their pre-school-aged children [8,9]. It is argued that oral health literacy act as a vital determinant of oral health [10].

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