Author's response to reviews

Title: The relationship between literacy and multimorbidity in a primary care setting

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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Editorial Office Biomed Central

Dear Dr Lorraine Wallace,

On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I would like to thank you and the reviewers for re-reviewing our manuscript “The relationship between literacy and multimorbidity in a primary care setting” (MS: 1009359848643946), submitted for publication to BMC Family Practice.

Below, you will find a detailed response addressing each reviewer’s comments.

Reviewer #3: Sandra Smith

Minor essential revisions

COMMENT:
I still wish the education levels were reported in a way that is more informative and comparable to other studies. The revised paper still reports percentages obtaining "12 yrs or less" education and "completed university studies". Better would be <12 yrs; 12 yrs; some college, > or = 4 yrs college degree.

RESPONSE:
Thank you. We have corrected Table 1 accordingly (page 25).

COMMENT:
A citation is needed to support the statement that "other categories of literacy skills could affect patients' ability to use information for health.” Nutbeam, D (2008) The evolving concept of health literacy. Social Science & Medicine; 67: 2072-2078.

RESPONSE:
Citation was added (bottom of page 5)
Reviewer #2: Suad Ghaddar

COMMENT:
Major Compulsory Revision

While the authors have adequately addressed all the minor essential revisions, I still feel that the implication of their main finding is weak (major compulsory revision). They merely mention that had there been a relationship between literacy and multimorbidity, then there would have been implications, which further weakens their discussion, since it means that the absence of a relationship has no implications. While they add a sentence "Other categories of literacy skills could also affect patients' ability to use information for health," that is in no way a thorough evaluation of one of the main limitations plaguing the health literacy literature: the absence of a measure that depicts accurately the multiple dimensions of health literacy

RESPONSE:

Thank you Dr. Ghaddar. We totally agree with your very relevant comment. We therefore made substantial changes in our introduction and discussion to address this. Our field of expertise lies in multimorbidity and it is through this lens that we conducted our study. We understand that our results may not have a very important impact in the literature on literacy or health literacy; however, they do have an impact for researchers interested in multimorbidity and its risk factors. In an ideal world, we would have liked to verify the relationship between health literacy and multimorbidity. Our hypothesis is that such a link exists and that it should be addressed. However, an instrument to measure health literacy globally does not exist at this time. We believe we now explain this thought process or reasoning in our introduction. Because of this, we had to use an instrument that measured literacy only. We thought such a link would exist but it was not the case. We consider our methods to have been sufficiently rigorous to have produced credible results. In addition, we attempted to explain these results in the discussion. After conducting this study, we now believe that there may be an independent link between literacy and certain targeted conditions (diabetes and heart failure for example) but not necessarily for chronic diseases as a whole. The main implication of this finding is that we should continue doing research in order to determine which diseases present such an association. We will also verify a potential link between health literacy and multimorbidity when valid instruments are available to measure health literacy. Although we did not observe a direct relationship between literacy and multimorbidity, it is still important to continue considering this important variable in patient care in order to tailor health information to patient needs and in a format they can understand.
As requested, we have provided written responses following each point made by the reviewers. We hope that you now find our revised manuscript suitable for publication in your journal and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Hudon MD PhD CFPC