THE MSU CAM HEALTH LITERACY SCALE

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Purpose: To present the MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale, a knowledge-based measure of health literacy about complementary and alternative therapies (CAM).

Rationale/Conceptual Basis/Background: Health literacy, or the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions, has become a public health priority. Inadequate health literacy is associated with a wide variety of adverse health outcomes. Growth in the use of CAM adds to the complexity of being sufficiently health literate. CAM is often self-care in nature and used without involvement of a health care provider. In a series of studies, our research team found that older rural residents used a considerable amount of self-prescribed CAM and often had limited health literacy about therapies they used. The Institute of Medicine cited a critical need for additional reliable and valid measures of health literacy and also for research on how consumers obtain, understand, and evaluate information about CAM. Accordingly, the team embarked on development of a measure of CAM health literacy.

Methods: A conceptual model of CAM health literacy was developed and used to guide the construction of the instrument. Multiple items for each empirical indicator in the model were developed and a 4 point Likert response option was selected. The draft instrument was reviewed by experts and focus groups, refined by the team, and administered by telephone interview to a sample of 600 randomly selected older adults from rural counties in the northwestern portion of the U.S. Exploratory factor analyses, reliabilities, and conceptual considerations were used to determine which items to retain in the instrument. A convergence validity assessment was conducted with data from a convenience sample of 110 older adults in which scores on the MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale were compared with scores on general health literacy measures.

Results: The MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale consists of 21 items with Cronbach’s alpha .753 and 42.27% explained variance. The validity assessment revealed weak but significant correlations between the scale and general health literacy measures. A person’s basic knowledge about the conceptual components of CAM Health Literacy, Dose, Effect, Safety, and Availability available to conference participants.

Implications for Research, Rural Health and/or Rural Practice: The MSU CAM Health Literacy Scale has promise for use in future research and clinical endeavors. Informed use of CAM can help support well-reasoned decision-making regarding self-care and help avoid harm for older rural adults living with chronic illnesses. A goal of this program of research is to develop an intervention to promote and improve health literacy about CAM. The intervention will be tailored to older rural adults although should be modifiable for use with other age groups and locations.

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