

# Abstract #715: Health Literacy of Allied Health Professionals: Pelvic Floor



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## Hypothesis / aims of study

Health literacy has recently garnered attention as an essential topic for health care practitioners to consider when treating their patients (Liu et al., 2020). While practitioners need to consider their patient's health literacy, they also need to evaluate their own health literacy to ensure that they eliminate biases about screening patients for health disorders.

Pelvic health disorders can be devastating for patients, affecting the quality of life of all genders, ages, and backgrounds. Patients may have difficulty talking with their providers about pelvic health issues or may not know which provider would be most appropriate to report their symptoms to. The question becomes, what are the providers' barriers to asking about pelvic floor disorders?

Health literacy has a variety of definitions depending on the type of literature reviewed. The most common synthesis of these definitions is that health literacy is the ability of a patient to understand and synthesize information about health care to make appropriate decisions in their care (Sørensen et al., 2012). High health literacy is desired and required for patients to be active participants in their care. Multiple factors exist in creating high health literacy, including socioeconomic, educational background, gender, and relationship with the health care practitioner (Liu et al., 2020; Sørensen et al., 2012; Toibin et al., 2017).

Physical therapists establish a therapeutic alliance with their patients by imparting knowledge. Communication between patient and therapist establishes trust and improves outcomes (Peyman et al., 2014). Improving the patient's health literacy can improve their overall satisfaction with care and make them more motivated to carry out their treatment program.

## Study design, materials and methods

This was a quantitative survey given to physiotherapy students in the United States in the summer of 2022. The survey was sent to program directors of every accredited physiotherapy program in the United States. The demographics of respondents are in the chart below. Participants were required to be enrolled in a physiotherapy graduate program, have English as their first language, and the ability to take an online survey.

### Instrumentation

- Health Literacy Questionnaire was used to assess the student's health literacy about pelvic health
- Domains of survey include both the ability to find out health information for themselves and for their patients
- General subjects of the HLQ are listed below

### Statistics

- Pearson's correlation was used with a bivariate analysis
- Multivariate linear regression was used to determine if personal health literacy was correlated in the ability to talk about it with their patients

### Descriptive Statistics of Participants

	Frequency	% of Sample
<b>Age</b>		
- 18-21	3	1.1
- 22-26	203	77.2
- 27-31	41	15.6
- 32 and older	16	6.1
<b>Year in School</b>		
- 1	47	17.9
- 2	88	33.5
- 3	124	47.1
- Recently Graduated	4	1.5
<b>Gender</b>		
- Male	45	17.1
- Female	216	82.1
- Non-Binary	2	0.2
- Prefer not to answer	0	

### Health Literacy Questionnaire Domains

Healthcare Provider Support

Having Sufficient Information

Actively Managing Health

Social Support

Critical Appraisal

Active engagement with healthcare providers

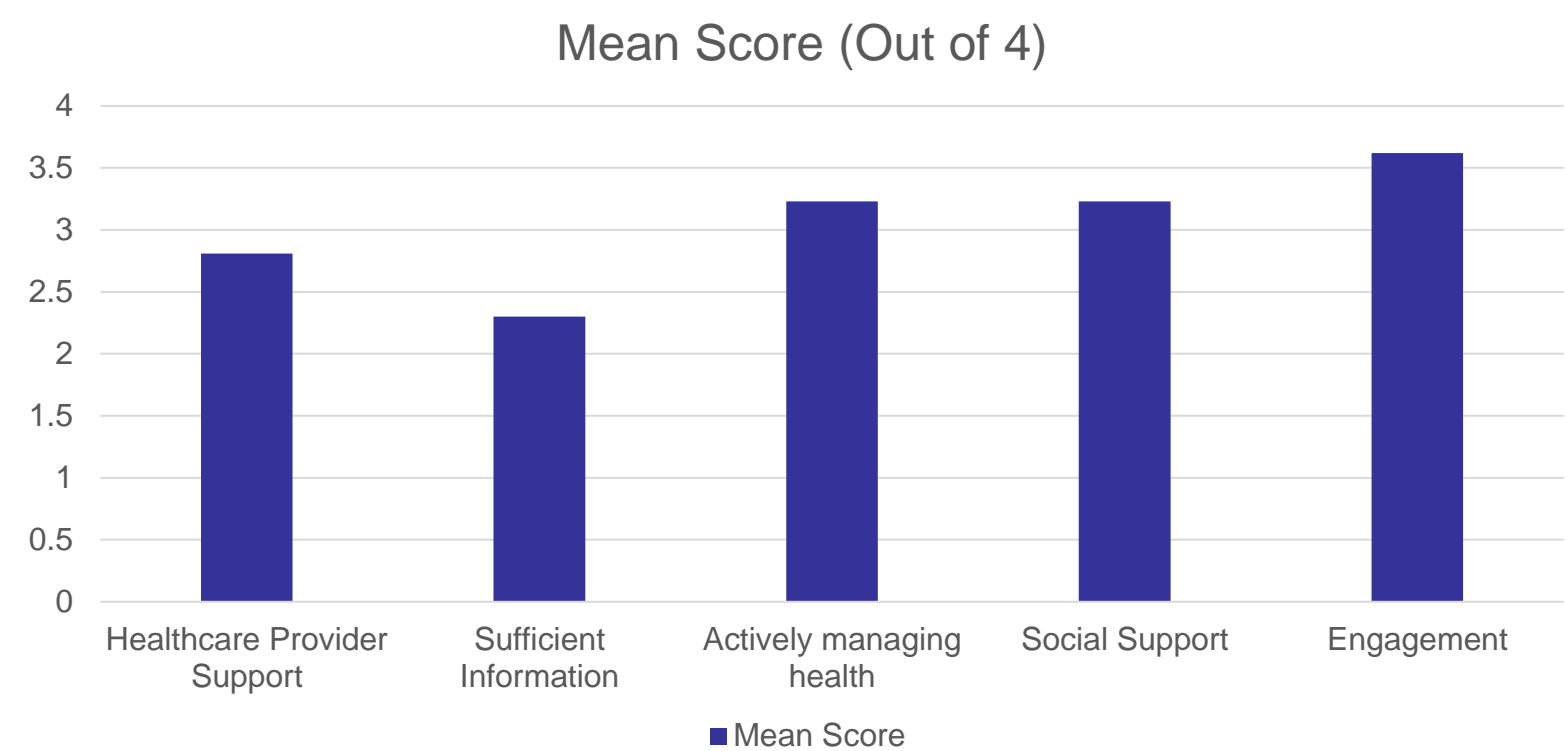
Navigating Healthcare System

Ability to find good health information

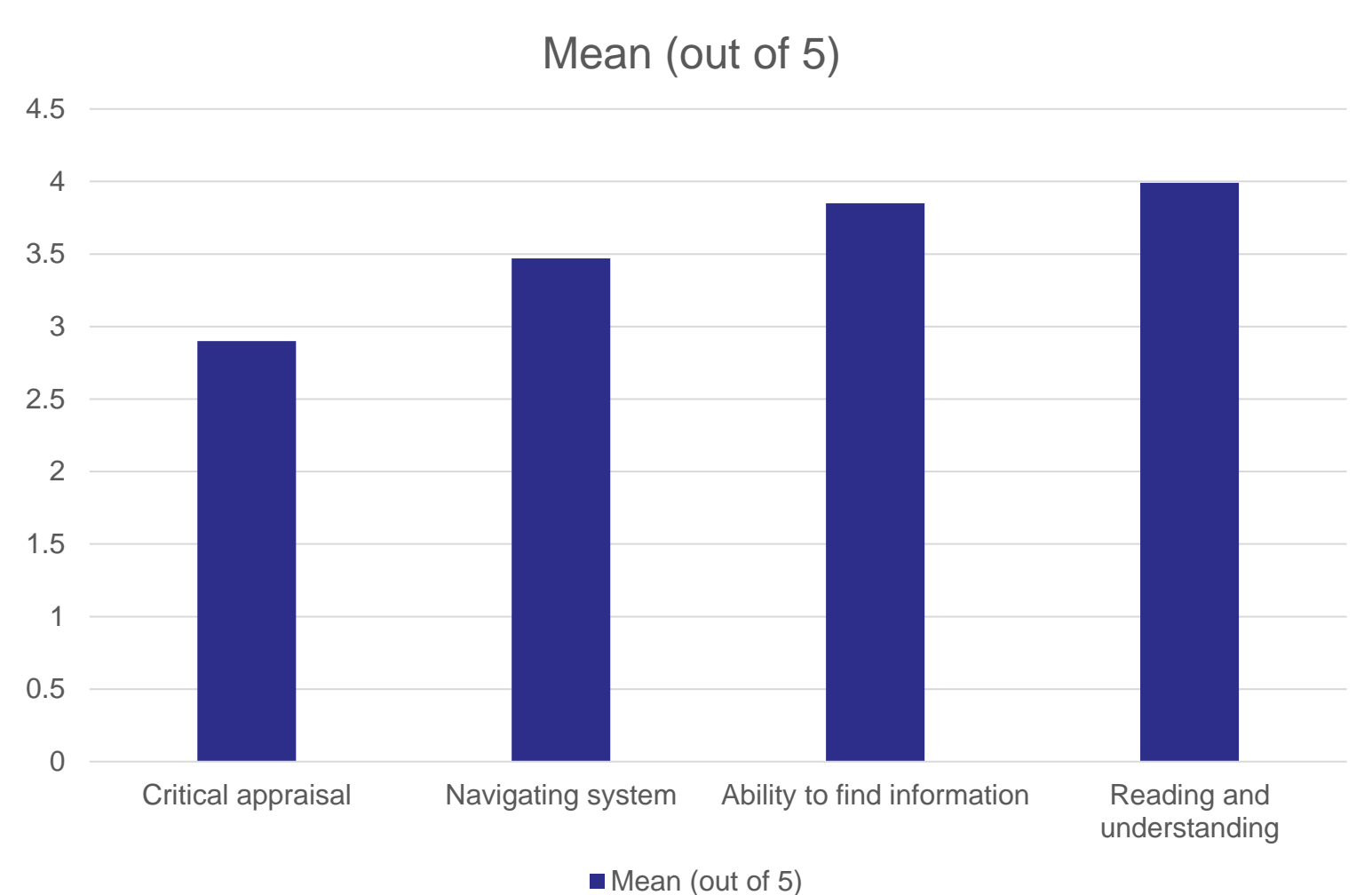
Reading and understanding health information

## Results and interpretation

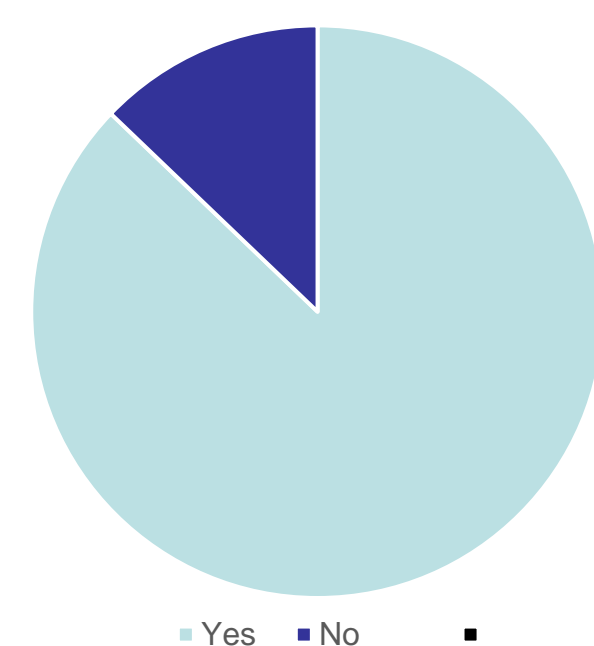
### Engagement with Providers (Overall Low Scores)



### Ability to Find Health Information (High Results)



### Comfort in Initiating Conversation about Pelvic Health



## Conclusions

- Original intent of this study was to understand the effect of health literacy on screening for pelvic health disorders and the ability of student physical therapists to refer to the specialist
- While this study did not show a significant correlation between health literacy and referral patterns, it showed specific gaps in the ability for students to feel comfortable seeking out pelvic health for themselves
- Students felt comfortable finding information for their patients, however they did not feel comfortable finding information about themselves
- Students also did not feel comfortable referring themselves for further work up for pelvic floor disorders

This study raises more important questions about physical therapy education in various contexts. Health literacy is essential to assess for those teaching entry-level physical therapy students. Without adequate health literacy, students may have gaps in knowledge that could have clinical implications for the way that they treat patients. For physical therapists to elevate their patients' understanding of disease or the recovery process, they must be able to adequately raise their patients' health literacy (Ishikawa & Kiuchi, 2010). Creating effective therapeutic alliances means that physical therapists' must become educators for their patients.

## References

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