

Horizon's COPD Health Literacy Project Receives International Attention

The first phase research findings of a Horizon Support Opportunities and Assistance for Research (SOAR) project – *Improving the Behaviours of COPD Patients: Is Health Literacy the Answer?* – was accepted earlier this year to be presented at the International Psychological Application and Trends Conference in Madeira, Portugal in April 2020.

The annual conference, which usually takes place in various cities across Europe, was held in a virtual format this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, researchers, lecturers, students, professionals from psychology and human sciences were able to network with their peers from across the world.

The conference showcased presentations from a diverse list of countries to promote the development and growth of research, teaching, applications, and new ways of thinking in the field of psychology.

Tracy Freeze, PhD, SOAR's Research Methodologist at Horizon's Saint John Regional Hospital, presented the project's first phase findings remotely, sharing the team's research into whether health literacy was associated with medication adherence and/or inhalation technique in older adults with COPD (Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), a life-threatening illness characterized by shortness of breath, cough and sputum production.

Tracy was also invited to submit the research project findings as a chapter for the book *Psychology Applications & Developments*.

"Not all conference participants are asked to submit book chapters, so this was a big deal,"



Natasha Hanson, PhD

said Natasha Hanson, PhD, SOAR's Research Manager. "This conference is very well-known in the research world, so we were excited to have an international platform to get our findings out there."

The research project hypothesized, and results confirmed, that lower levels of health literacy, i.e. the ability to access, understand, evaluate and communicate information to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course, would be associated with lower levels of medication adherence and inhalation technique in older adults.

The research team concluded that providing COPD information repeatedly and over the progression of the disease would address the informational needs of COPD patients (as identified by the research participants). Therefore, the information that is provided to



Tracy Freeze, PhD

older adults needs to be tailored to their needs.

In other words, information on COPD needs to improve not only in quantity but also in quality.

"COPD educational materials must be better suited to this segment of COPD patients," said Natasha. "We can now build on the applicable and practical applications of this project, which will help these patients use their medications appropriately."

The SOAR team would also like to see other health researchers in New Brunswick build on this research.

"We're at a bit of a pause with this research because of COVID-19," said Natasha. "But I'm grateful to have the capacity to share the study's findings with others, which after all, is the goal of research."

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