Reversing social gradient: Impact of patients’ communication with their practitioners on adherence to preventive behaviours

Michele BAUMANN 1, Barbara BUCKI 2, Anastase TCHICAYA 3 & Etienne LE BIHAN 1

1 INSIDE. Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality. University of Luxembourg. Michele.baumann@uni.lu
2 Ligue Luxembourgeoise d’Hygiène Mentale, Service Information Prévention h.bucki@prevention.lu
3 Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER). Anataste.tchicaya@liser.lu

Good communication with a physician has positive effects on patients’ adopting preventive behaviours. But the question is: what are the health inequalities concerning their perceived financial situation? We aimed at analysing in what extent financial situation influences the associations between quality of communication and improved secondary preventive behaviours and limited risk factors – in cardiovascular diseases: hypertension, overweight, obesity, hypercholesterolemia, diabetes.

Method. 1,289 patients who underwent a coronary angiography in Luxembourg completed a self-administered questionnaire in 2008/09 and 2013/14. The association between improving each preventive eating behaviour (decrease salt, sugar, and fat intake; increase of fruits/vegetables) and the quality of physician-patient communication (5-items scale) was evaluated using logistic regression models. Perceived financial situation (difficult, easy, and very easy) was introduced in interaction with the communication score.

From the point of view of preventive behaviours, the increase in fruit and vegetable consumption is always associated with the quality of physician-patient communication regardless of the risk factors. Regardless of the risk factor, the quality of doctor-patient communication has no connection with the decrease in fat intake.

The effects of the quality of communication are generally more pronounced when patients declare themselves to be in a difficult financial situation. Thus, patients in a difficult or easy financial situation have a pronounced when patients declare themselves to be in a difficult financial situation.

Concerning reduction or cessation of sugar consumption, there is an association between communication quality and the probability that the patient will improve his behaviour. This is very significant in patients with diabetes regardless of their financial situation. Similarly, the link is significant among patients suffering from hypercholesterolemia in a difficult financial situation.

Conclusion. The quality of communication has a higher impact on adopting healthy behaviours in patients declaring themselves in financial difficulty. These findings raise awareness on the importance of physician-patient quality of communication in patients with perceived financial difficulties in improving adherence to secondary preventive recommendations. Across the lifespan, it highlights the role of physicians in reversing their patients’ social gradient.

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