



Understanding Health Equity



Overview

During your peer mentoring journey, you will have the opportunity to meet a variety of individuals with kidney disease. They may have different religions, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, disabilities, and socioeconomic statuses.

Often, people lack the skills to manage their kidney disease. In addition to the stigma associated with limited health literacy, they may be afraid to ask questions.

The more you learn about health equity, the more you will be able to support your mentee, help them understand their kidney disease, and assist in improving their quality of life, which could lead to better health outcomes.



Health Equity Definitions

It is important to understand the meaning of health equity and the words associated with this term.

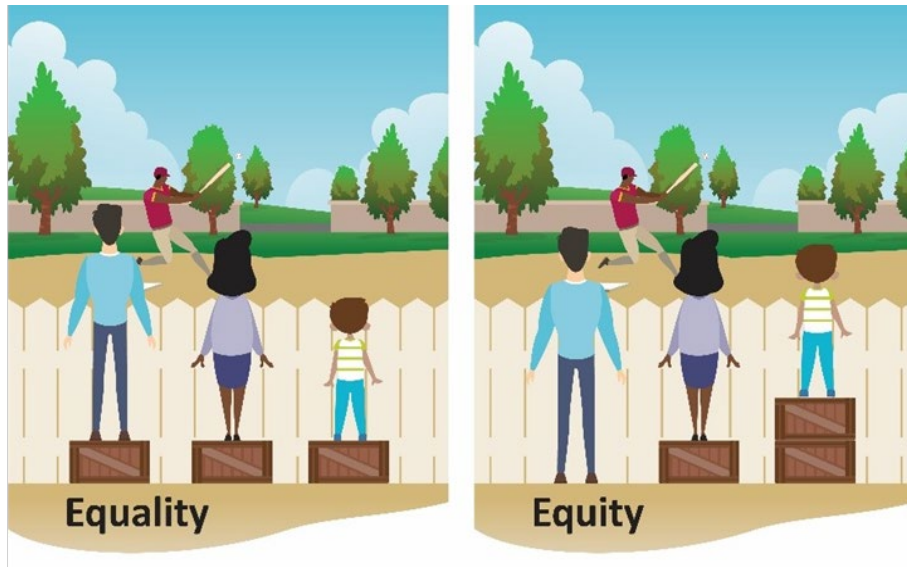
Let us look at some common terms and their definitions:

- **Health Equity** happens when everyone has the same chance to get the best health regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, how much money they have, where they live, or the language they speak.¹
- **Health Disparity** is a health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage. Health disparities negatively affect groups of people who have a hard time getting access to good health because of their race, belief, income, sexual orientation, etc.²
- **Social Determinants of Health** are non-medical factors that impact health outcomes. Examples of non-medical factors include education, income, employment status, or housing.
- **Health-related Social Needs** are unmet needs, such as food insecurity, inadequate or unstable housing, which may increase the risk of developing chronic conditions, reduce an individual's ability to manage these conditions, increase healthcare costs, and lead to avoidable healthcare utilization.

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Health Equity. <https://www.cms.gov/pillar/health-equity>

² Kaiser Family Foundation. Disparities in Health and Health Care: 5 Key Questions and Answers. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-5-key-questions-and-answers/>

- **Health literacy** refers to an individual’s capacity to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.³ Each peer mentee learns by a different method.



Improving Health Literacy

Health literacy is one area of health equity that mentors can really support their mentees. Take the time to listen to the mentee about his or her daily activities, knowledge, health, and cultural and religious beliefs. As a peer mentor, you will need to adjust your teaching methods to meet the needs of that mentee.

For example, if the mentee does not read well, you might have to read the materials or resources to him or her or provide resources with pictures. The same would apply if the mentee has poor vision. If available, provide educational materials in audio form (videos or podcasts). Patients may learn best in their native language. The End Stage Renal Disease National Coordinating Center (ESRD NCC) provides several resources in multiple languages and offers real-time translation of ESRD NCC web pages.

Do not assume that all mentees are able to use or have access to cell phones and/or computers.

About 25% of chronic kidney disease patients experience limited health literacy.¹

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2030.



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Examples of health literacy include being able to:

- Understand instructions like:
 - How to wash vascular access.
 - Dialysis procedures, such as cannulation.
- Read or listen to educational materials.
- Understand care management and lab test results.
- Complete forms.

People with limited health literacy are more likely to:

- Have chronic medical conditions and trouble managing them.
- Miss important medical tests or dialysis treatments.
- Be in the hospital more often.
- Visit the emergency room more often.
- Mix up their medications.

Helpful Tips

Here are some tips that mentors can share with mentees that might be helpful:

- Bring your questions to healthcare appointments.
- Ask for resources that use plain language, pictures, or are available as videos.
- Repeat information in your own words.
- Ask for clarification.
- Bring someone with you.
- Let the clinic know if you need an interpreter.
- Refer them to reliable resources such, as the ESRD NCC or their ESRD Network.

Additional Resources

To learn more about the ESRD NCC Health Equity work, visit www.esrdncc.org/healthequity.