

# The general public lacks basic medical knowledge

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The general public are worryingly ignorant about the symptoms and risk factors that contribute to serious medical conditions such as stroke and HIV/AIDS, according to a study published in the online open access journal BMC Medicine. Surprisingly, those with university degrees, a medical background or personal experience of an illness are only slightly better informed.

Lucas M. Bachmann from the University of Zurich, Switzerland and colleagues devised a scale to measure people's minimal medical knowledge (MMK) of heart attack, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and HIV/AIDS. This included questions such as: "How can one protect oneself from HIV infection"" and "What are the symptoms of a heart attack"" It was tested on 185 adults.

The average score was just 32%, and no one scored 100%. The fact that having a university degree, a medical background or personal experience of an illness only slightly improved individual scores is a particular cause for concern, the authors say, and may occur because people prefer to take health-related advice from trustworthy figures in positions of authority, rather than actively seek it themselves.

It is essential that people know the symptoms and risk factors linked to serious clinical conditions since early detection can positively influence treatment outcome, say the authors. It can also cut related costs and reduce risk-taking behaviour.

Source: BioMed Central

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