

# Patient-centered care during COVID-19 promoted

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The COVID-19 pandemic has diminished people's ability to make in-

person, human connections, and such relationships are especially important in health care. However, healthcare organizations can improve connections with their patients, according to a review article from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa public health researchers published in *Quality Management in Health Care*.

Researchers including AJ Patil, a Ph.D. student with the Office of Public Health Studies (OPHS) in the Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health, examined how healthcare organizations can use "organizational [health literacy](#)" to promote patient-centered care, even during this time of crisis and uncertainty.

"This pandemic has created extraordinary disruption in the [healthcare system](#), but the disruption provides an opportunity to implement new ways of doing things," Patil said.

Organizational health literacy means that healthcare organizations implement policies and practices that make it easier for their [patients](#) to navigate the system and access the services they need to take care of their health.

"A health-literate organization is easy to navigate and empowers individuals to overcome cultural, linguistic, economic and educational barriers and meet their health needs," said Tetine Sentell, professor and director in OPHS, who was the lead author of the study.

## **Creating patient- and family-centered councils**

Specifically, healthcare organizations can engage in practices such as creating patient- and family-centered councils to understand patient and caregiver needs, ensuring support that allows all patients to feel comfortable using tools such as glucose monitors and pulse oximeters for remote care management, and offering telehealth appointments with true

human connectivity, Sentell said.

Technology can play a strong role in improving organizational health literacy. Smartphone apps can improve the coordination of care between providers, and interactive patient-centered discharge toolkits can promote patients' self-management skills when they go home from the hospital. However, patients who do not have access to technology, or do not understand it, need to be included in planning for organizational health literacy.

Healthcare leaders can make understanding and addressing patients' full range of needs for information a priority within their organizations. "In this time of transformation, the principles of organizational health literacy provide a road map for promoting patient-centered care," Patil said. "Our review shows that using strategies aimed at improving organizational health literacy can help healthcare organizations to meet their goals, improve outcomes for patients and reduce health disparities."

**More information:** Tetine Sentell et al. Organizational Health Literacy: Opportunities for Patient-Centered Care in the Wake of COVID-19, *Quality Management in Health Care* (2020). [DOI: 10.1097/QMH.0000000000000279](https://doi.org/10.1097/QMH.0000000000000279)

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