Correlations between Locus of Control and Opportunities for Health Behaviors

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Introduction

One’s belief in his or her ability to make health choices, even when the opportunity is available, may affect behavior. These opportunities for healthy behavior are called “capabilities,” and this study used a new survey to measure this concept. The concept of locus of control addresses responsibility for actions. Individuals with an internal locus of control generally hold themselves responsible for actions and consequences, while those with an external locus of control tend to believe that chance or powerful others are responsible.

Materials and Methods

Participants were outpatients from 8 clinical sites of the Residency Research Network of Texas, a collaboration of family medicine residency programs. Eligibility criteria included adults ages 18-74 who spoke English or Spanish.

Procedure. Medical student research assistants approached 829 patients as they waited for their office visit, and invited them to complete the study questionnaire. 637 patients completed surveys, for a participation rate of 77%.

Measures. The 118- item patient survey included patient demographics, Locus of Control, BMI, diet, physical activity and a new scale measuring Health Capabilities, including convenience, knowledge, support, time, and illness barriers.

Results

This sample was 67.5% female with a mean age of 44.5 years. 55% were Hispanic participants. The mean locus of control scores were: Internality (3.72), Powerful Others (3.07) and Chance (2.49). Most measures of Health Capabilities positively correlated (p<0.05) with an Internal locus of control, and negatively with Powerful Others and Chance. People with a stronger Internal locus of control were also more physically active, and spent more time sitting.

Discussion

Internally oriented patients may have more independence in identifying resources and pursuing a healthier lifestyle, while externally oriented patients may be more reliant on the Powerful Other physician to direct them. Further research is needed to determine whether one’s capabilities form perception of locus of control or if the inverse holds true.

References