Health literacy is in its core concerned with the individual ability to access and use health information in a way that maintain and promote good health. Over the past decades, alongside an increasing interest, health literacy has evolved into a rather broad and complex concept that makes it difficult to develop a universal definition of this concept. The concept of health literacy has only recently been introduced in the Scandinavian context and as a result the amount of literature regarding health literacy in the Danish context is very limited and there has also been a total lack of screening instruments until very recently. One of the research objectives, of this current PhD study, was to identify a definition of health literacy suitable for working with this concept in the Danish context and develop a screening instrument accordingly. There has been a rapid development of technology over the past years – something that is also reflected in modern healthcare systems with the occurrence of new channels for delivering health information and health care. Telehomecare is a branch of technology that allows obtainment and transmission of vital signs from the patients’ residence to healthcare professionals. Telehomecare interventions often comprise educational components that contain information on the current health status of patients and disease management, and in this regard, health literacy can be considered a prerequisite for exploiting the true potential of telehomecare. This PhD study used a telehomecare intervention (the Telekit offered by the TeleCare North project) that includes educational components, and the above-mentioned considerations gave rise to the overall objective: to explore if a certain level of health literacy is needed to truly benefit from using the telehomecare technology and if the use of the telehomecare technology influences the level of health literacy.

The American TOFHLA is considered one of the gold standards in the assessment of functional health literacy, and a Danish version of this instrument was developed during this PhD study. The Danish TOFHLA can now be considered reliable for use in research projects, which test levels of functional health literacy in an elderly Danish population at risk of chronic diseases. Thereby, it was also considered ready for use in the actual study that assessed if the use of telehomecare has an effect on functional health literacy both short term and long term. The actual study also explored if a certain level of functional health literacy is needed to use telehomecare technology. Overall, the short-term findings suggest that the telehomecare intervention (the Telekit offered by the TeleCare North project) is very easy to use – a certain level of functional health literacy is not needed and it can be considered user-friendly. The long-term effects regarded a rather similar increase in the level of functional health literacy in both the intervention group and the control group, so it is probably not due to the use of the telehomecare intervention. One explanation can be the enrolment in a scientific project like the TeleCare North, as this might contribute to a greater interest and more engagement in their disease and treatment – something that might make patients seek out more health information. Another explanation can simply be that the Danish TOFHLA is subject to retest bias. The PhD study does, however, not allow clarification of, which explanation is the most plausible one, so future research should assess if the Danish TOFHLA is in fact subject to retest bias.
To fulfil the requirements for the Ph.D. degree, Lisa Korsbakke Emtekær Hæsum has submitted the thesis: (Functional) Health literacy and the use of telehomecare technology - an exploration of both sides of the interaction, to the Faculty Council of Medicine at Aalborg University.

The Faculty Council has appointed the following adjudication committee to evaluate the thesis and the associated lecture:

Professor Sabine Koch
Karolinska Institutet
Sweden

Associate Professor Lars Kayser
Copenhagen University
Denmark

Chairman:  
Associate Professor Lasse Riis Østergaard  
Medical Informatics Group, Aalborg University
Denmark  

Moderator:  
Professor Johannes Struijk  
Medical Informatics Group, Aalborg University
Denmark

The Ph.D. lecture is public and will take place on:  
Monday 1 June 2015 at 13:00  
Aalborg University – Niels Jernes Vej 14 room 4-107  
9220 Aalborg East

Program for Ph.D. lecture
by
Lisa Korsbakke Emtekær Hæsum

Monday 1 June 2015

(Functional) Health literacy and the use of telehomecare technology
- an exploration of both sides of the interaction

Chairman:  
Dr. Lasse Riis Østergaard
Moderator:  
Dr. Johannes Struijk

13.00 Opening by the Moderator
13.05 Ph.D. lecture by Lisa Korsbakke Emtekær Hæsum
13.50 Break
14.00 Questions and comments from the Committee
Questions and comments from the audience at the Moderator’s discretion
16.00 Conclusion of the session by the Moderator

After the session a reception will be arranged in C1-215 (MI meeting room)