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Education

The advantages of educational attainment for employment and income are well documented. According to the United States Bureau of Labor statistics for 2013, unemployment rates and median weekly earnings were as follows for levels of educational attainment:

Less than high school diploma	11.0%	\$ 472
High school diploma	7.5%	\$ 651
Bachelor's degree	4.0%	\$1,108
Master's degree	3.4%	\$1,329
Professional degree	2.3%	\$1,714

Although data regarding the health advantages associated with educational attainment are less current, the numbers are compelling. Using death certificate data from 2005, the life expectancy for adults at age 25 (women - left column; men - right column) were as follows:

Less than high school diploma	75	69
High school diploma	81	76
College graduate	87	82
Graduate degree	87	85

Compared to a person who didn't complete high school, a college graduate can expect to live over 10 years longer. Interestingly, the relationship between educational attainment and life expectancy has been increasing, because in 1990 this difference was only about 2 years.

For further comparison, an analysis published in the journal Circulation in 2008 examined the gain in life expectancy that would occur if every person received the prevention

activities for which she/he is a candidate. The prevention activities examined were low dose aspirin, lowering LDL cholesterol to indicated guidelines, lowering blood pressure to recommended levels, maintaining blood glucose at target levels, quitting smoking, and reducing weight to a body mass index (BMI) of less than 30. The average gain in life expectancy for persons achieving these goals was 1.3 years.

How is it that educational attainment is so strongly related to life expectancy? Of course, this relationship isn't so simple that one can attribute all of the health benefits to simply staying in school. Educational attainment is related to a multitude of other factors that affect health. There are circumstances that affect both access to education and health, such as early life experiences, race, ethnicity, financial resources, and shared genetic factors. More educational attainment is associated with better paying jobs (as noted earlier) and the associated benefits such as health care access, better (often healthier) housing environments, and potentially less vulnerability to pollution and crime. Persons with more education tend to have healthier lifestyles, better management of chronic conditions, and more resources for coping with stress.

Access to education and achievement in the educational domain are very significant for the health of individuals and for our population, because of what they represent regarding vulnerabilities and opportunities. In the healthcare arena, the educational level of the patient is beginning to be considered with respect to how aggressively a risk factor or medical condition should be treated. The importance of the data and studies mentioned above suggests that it is vital that education be considered in contemporary discussions of health.

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