Project title: **New insights into the concept of critical health literacy: Development and validation of a measure of health information appraisal skills.**

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Start date (duration): **October 1, 2016 (3 years)**

**SUMMARY**

**Background** “Should I vaccinate my children?” “How often am I supposed to undergo colorectal cancer screening?” “Should I continue taking my antibiotics even if I am feeling better?” These are only a few examples of the several health-related decisions people are confronted with on a daily basis. With the advent of new media (in particular the Internet), people have the opportunity to base their health decisions on countless information sources. The increase in the number of – and the ease of access to – sources, however, has brought along an increasing variance in information quality, putting consumers at risk of acting upon wrong information. Although the ability to critically appraise the vast amount of health information is widely recognized as a crucial component of health literacy, it is not yet clear what kind of skills are needed to adequately accomplish this task. This makes both the assessment of these skills and the development and evaluation of related interventions difficult.

**Aims of the study** By systematically building on past research in relevant fields and actively involving health information consumers and healthcare providers in the process, the proposed study aims at conceptualizing, operationally defining, and measuring people’s health information appraisal skills.

**Methods** To reach the proposed aim three subsequent studies are planned. Study 1 will be a scoping review to identify conceptualizations, operational definitions, and measures of information appraisal that have been proposed in the different disciplines dealing with appraisal of information (e.g., health communication, media studies, information science, computer science, education, psychology, and critical thinking). The consensus meetings planned in Study 2 have the specific aim of conceptually validating the skills identified in Study 1 by including the perspective of health information consumers and healthcare providers. The result of these two steps will be a first conceptualization and operational definition of the concept of health information appraisal, i.e. a list of the most important skills for a person to critically appraise health information. The operational definition will form a strong conceptual basis for the last study (Study 3), which aims at establishing (i.e., develop and validate) a measure of Health Information Appraisal Skills (HIAS). The operational definition of health information appraisal will therefore be translated in a skill-based measure, which will be rigorously pretested and validated into a sample of citizens from the three Swiss language regions and with different socio-economical background. The measure will be theory-based and will be designed to overcome most of the limitations of measuring instruments currently used in health literacy research.

**Expected results and significance of the project** By integrating theoretical concepts and empirical findings from different research fields, the proposed research has several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, it will shed light on a crucial, yet understudied, health literacy domain, thus contributing to the theoretical clarity of the concept. From a practical perspective, the proposed studies will provide researchers and policy makers with a valid and usable tool to measure of health information appraisal, which
could be used routinely as a screening tool or outcome measure for public health interventions or as a way of identifying citizens who are most at risk of wrongly appraising the quality of health information. At the same time, it will provide useful insights on the appraisal skills that are most problematic in the Swiss population, and therefore more in need to be addressed in future intervention