

HEALTH LITERACY

A Two-Way Street
In Communications

Peter Sarver - Sept. 16, 2008

What is Health Literacy?

- "The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."
- "The ability to read, understand and act on health information."

The Scope of Low Health Literacy

- 30 million Americans have literacy skills defined as "below basic." Such individuals have difficulty comprehending directions for taking medicine or understanding an appointment slip. Another 63 million are at the "basic" level. They find it difficult to calculate a dose of an over-the-counter medication or comprehend a consent form.

Scope – Alternative Language

- “The health of 90 million people in the U.S. may be at risk because of the difficulty some patients experience in understanding and acting up health information.”
- A disproportionate number of minorities and immigrants are estimated to have literacy problems.

Prevalence Calculator

- 65+ = 0%
- Medicaid = 100%
- White = 30%
- Black = 55%
- Hispanic = 15%
- Lang Other Than Eng = 15%
- % Pts w/limited health literacy = 45%

Educational Levels

- 18 yrs & older = 222,723,000
- High school graduate or less = 46.6%
- Some college or higher education degrees = 53.4%
- Master's degree or higher = 8.7%
- Source: US Census Bureau 2007

Young Adults (18-24 yr olds)
Educational Attainment

- 11th grade or less = 21.1%
- 12th grade or less = 34.6%

Contexts for Literacy

- Cultural & Conceptual Knowledge
- Oral Literacy – Listening & Speaking
- Print Literacy – Writing & Reading
- Numeracy

Health Literacy Affects
People's Abilities

- To navigate the health care system, including filling out complex forms and locating providers and services
- To share personal information, such as health history, with providers
- To engage in self-care and chronic disease management
- To understand mathematical concepts such as probability and risk

[Big Jump – CDC for 2006]

- 40,000
- 56,300

[HIV Therapy & Health Literacy]

- When the effects of literacy were considered, 'literacy' was a significant predictor of non-adherence, such that patients with low literacy were 2.1 times more likely to be non-adherent to their medication than patients with adequate literacy. "Health Literacy: An Overlooked Factor in Understanding HIV Health Disparities" AJPM 2007

[Improve the Usability of Health Information]

- Is the Information appropriate for the users?
- Is the information easy to use?
- Are you speaking clearly and listening carefully?

Is the information appropriate for the users?

- Identify the intended users of the health information and services.
- Evaluate users' understanding before, during and after the introduction of information and services.
- Acknowledge cultural differences and practice respect. [Cultural Competencies]

Professional Incompetence

Talking with Patients: "Most patients can be talked to as one might talk to a highly educated brother or sister with expertise in a nonmedical field."
From "Physician Assistant: A Guide to Clinical Practice" (2nd Ed.) Ballweg, Ruth et al (1999)

Assessment Tools

- Research Oriented – REALM = Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine
- NVS = Newest Vital Sign by Pfizer – administered in clinical setting in just three minutes
- Go to www.pfizerhealthliteracy.org

[Is the information easy to use?]

- Limit the number of messages, use plain language, and focus on action.
- Supplement instructions with pictures.
- Make written communication look easy to read.
- Improve the usability of information on the internet.

[Plain Language]

Plain English is typically quite interesting to read. It's robust and direct—the opposite of gaudy, pretentious language. You achieve plain English when you use the simplest, most straightforward way of expressing an idea. You can still choose interesting words. But you'll avoid fancy ones that have everyday replacements meaning precisely the same thing. Bryan Garner, from *Legal Writing in Plain English*, 2001 (modified)

[Words to Watch]

- Medical Words
- Concept Words
- Category Words
- HIV/AIDS Words
- Frey Readability Formula for Text

[HIV/AIDS Symptoms]

- WebMD
- Mayo Clinic
- CDC
- NYSDOH (ACR)

[Are you speaking clearly and listening carefully?]

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use a medically trained interpreter.
[Multicultural Association of Medical Interpreters = MAMI; Syr-214 5003]
- Check for understanding.
- Participate in plain language and cultural competency training.

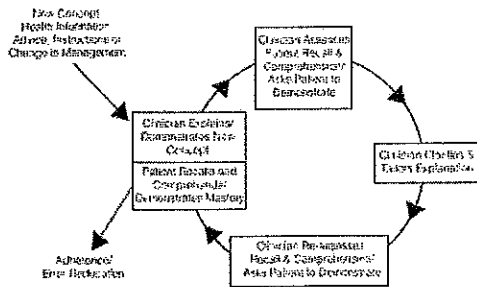
[Informed Consent]

- The right of a person to be informed about services to be provided and to make autonomous decisions.
- Informed consent involves concerns of capacity, comprehension of information, and voluntariness.
- Impact of low health literacy?

AskMe3

- What is main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

Teach-Back/Show-Me Method



Medication Labels

Navigating the Health Care System

- "Navigating Health Care: Finding your way through today's system" booklet produced by St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center.

- Hard copies are available free of charge by e-mailing St. Joseph's at community.relations@sjhsyr.org or calling the community relations office at 315-703-2140.

Making Referrals to Literacy Programs

- Be Informed
- Be Caring
- Be Realistic
- Be There

Community Resources

- Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County
- Literacy Volunteers of Greater Syracuse, go to <http://www.lvgs.org/>
- ProLiteracy, go to <http://proliteracy.org/>
- REACH CNY (Family Ties Network), go to <http://www.familytiesnetwork.org/>

[HRSA On-Line Training]

- Unified Health Communication: Addressing Health Literacy, Cultural Competency, and Limited English Proficiency
- Go to www.hrsa.gov/healthliteracy/training.htm

[Resources]

- Health Literacy – Help Your Patients Understand [Kit includes video] – AMA Foundation
- Health Literacy Performance Assessments, go to www.dpi.state.wi.us/sspw/pdf/hlahiv.pdf

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