



# **Keeping it Simple:** **Making the Connection** **between Health literacy** **and Patient Safety**

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## **Objectives**

- **Define Health Literacy**
- **Discuss the connection between health literacy and patient safety**
- **Discuss techniques to assess and address limited health literacy skills**
- **Analyze a patient education health message using plain language**

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## What is Health Literacy?

Here is the most basic definition from the Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc.:

*Health literacy is the ability to read, understand, and act on health care information.*

*([http://www.chcs.org/usr\\_doc/Health\\_Literacy\\_Fact\\_Sheets.pdf](http://www.chcs.org/usr_doc/Health_Literacy_Fact_Sheets.pdf) retrieved May 7, 2008)*

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## What is Health Literacy?

**Healthy People 2010 defines health literacy as:**

“the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

*([http://www.chcs.org/usr\\_doc/Health\\_Literacy\\_Fact\\_Sheets.pdf](http://www.chcs.org/usr_doc/Health_Literacy_Fact_Sheets.pdf) retrieved May 7, 2008)*

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## What is Health Literacy?

**The American Medical Association Council of Scientific Affairs more specifically defines *functional* health literacy as**

“the ability to read and comprehend prescription bottles, appointment slips, and the other essential health related materials required to successfully function as a patient.”

([http://www.chcs.org/usr\\_doc/Health\\_Literacy\\_Fact\\_Sheets.pdf](http://www.chcs.org/usr_doc/Health_Literacy_Fact_Sheets.pdf), retrieved May 7, 2008)

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## Why does it Matter?

Millions of Americans have trouble understanding health information or the health message.

Older people, non white, immigrants, and those with low income are disproportionately more likely to have trouble reading and understanding health related information.

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## Why does it Matter?

According to the National Adult Literacy survey, as many as 44 million people (age 16 & older) or 23% of all adults in the US are functionally illiterate.

On a scale of 100% of people surveyed who had limited reading ability  
67% had not disclosed to their spouse  
52% to their children and  
15% told no-one...

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## Scary statistics: Adult literacy 2000 Washington, DC Census

- 7.8% of DC residents 25 years old or older had a less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade education
- 14.4% had a 9-12 grade education (did not graduate from high school)
- 22.2% District residents did not graduate from high school
- According to the National Center for Education Statistics 2003 report **Health Literacy of America's Adults**, "some 49% of adults who had never attended or did not complete high school had Below Basic health literacy.

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## Below basic means:

The NAAL categorizes Below Basic as the ability to perform only the most **simple and concrete literacy skills** such as:

- searching in a simple text to find out what a patient is allowed to drink before a medical test.
- signing a form
- adding amounts on a bank deposit slip
- following simple instructions

According to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), almost 45% of the United States population (or 93 million Americans) have only **basic or below basic** literacy skills

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## Implications for health outcomes and safety

**Low health literacy negatively impacts health outcomes. Adults with low health literacy:**

- Are often less likely to comply with prescribed treatment and self-care regimens
- Make more medication or treatment errors
- Fail to seek preventive care (74% did not know their family was eligible for free care)
- Are at a higher risk for hospitalization than people with adequate literacy skills
- Remain in hospital nearly 2 days longer
- Lack the skills needed to negotiate the health care system
- Unable to read consent forms, or the rights and responsibility section

**RESULT:** poorer health care outcomes and increased health care costs

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## Our children are at RISK

Increase risk of infant morbidity and mortality

Not able to finish school → Trade school  
College

Inability to Communicate

Decrease Confidence and self esteem

Children with disabilities and special needs

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## Our children are at RISK

Ages 5-17 in families in poverty, 2007

- **District rate is 24.8%**
- **Maryland rate is 9.7%**
- **Virginia rate is 11.9%**

Source: Census data, 2007

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## Myths surrounding literacy

- **Myth #1: "Illiterates are dumb and learn slowly, if at all."**

Reality: When a person has trouble reading, it tends to be related more to economic factors than to low intelligence. Most people with low literacy skills have average IQs, and they function well in daily life by compensating for their lack of reading skills in other ways

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## Myths surrounding literacy

- **Myth #2: "Most illiterates are immigrants or minorities."**

Reality:

An estimated 40 to 44 million adults in the United States are functionally illiterate

(that is, they can't perform basic reading tasks required to function in society) and 50

million are marginally illiterate. Most of these people are white, native-born Americans.

However, as a percentage of the population, more minorities and immigrants do have

difficulties reading English. (It is important to note that English is not the primary

language of many immigrants, who may be highly literate in their first or native

languages.

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## Myths surrounding literacy

### **Myth #3: "People will tell you if they can't read."**

#### **Reality:**

There is a strong stigma attached to people with reading problems, and nearly all non-readers or poor readers try to conceal the fact that they have trouble reading. In a study of 58 patients who admitted having difficulty reading, 67 percent had never told their spouse, and 19 percent had never told anyone.

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## Myths surrounding literacy

### **Myth #4: "The number of completed years of schooling is a good measure of literacy level."**

**Reality:** Surveys have shown that, on average, adults read three to five grade levels lower than the years of schooling they have completed. And through disuse, the reading skills of many older adults may decrease over time.

From: **Health Literacy Myths, Misperceptions and Reality**  
<http://www.idph.state.ia.us/fsbupdate/common/pdf/110804.pdf>  
retrieved May 7, 2008

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## AMA Clip

Start CD



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## How do we assess and address?

Assess:

Assess for factors that may influence learning

Look for clues- I will read later, I do not have my glasses, place paper down

Filling out forms incorrectly or ask someone else to do it

Use the teach back method to check for understanding

Speak clearly and listen carefully

Ask open ended questions



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## Use Plain Language

What is Plain language? Strategy for making written and oral information easier to understand.

- Organizing and presenting information so it makes sense
- Put the most important points first
- Use simple words and define technical terms
- Break down complex information
- Know your learner
- Contact language services when appropriate
- Test the message to see if they understand it

### Activity #1

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## Create a Shame free Environment

- Use common words
- Listen to patient and family
- Respect child/adolescent/family
- Acknowledge their beliefs
- Give information in small blocks
- Use oral and visual tools to increase learning
- Provide surrogate readers if necessary
- Give simple instructions

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## Create a Shame free Environment

- Ask patient/family to partner with you in the care
- Create a patient/family centered environment (see through their eyes, involve and individualize)
- Eye contact if culturally appropriate

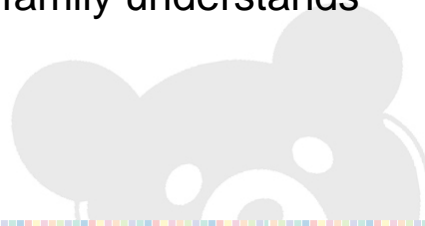


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## Use living room language

- Slow down your pace
- Use non-medical terms
- Define terms
- Use repetition
- Verify what the patient/family understands



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## The Newest Vital Sign

- The **Newest Vital Sign** is a bilingual (English and Spanish) screening tool that identifies patients at risk for low health literacy.
- The tool can be administered in a clinical setting in just three minutes.
- The test result provides information about the patient that will allow providers to appropriately adapt their communication practices in an effort to achieve better health outcomes.

<http://www.pfizerhealthliteracy.com/public-health-professionals/newest-vital-sign.html>

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## Newest Vital Sign example

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size	½ cup
Servings per container	4
Amount per serving	
Calories 250	Fat Cal 120
%	
<b>Total Fat</b> 13g	20%
Sat Fat 9g	40%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 28mg	12%
<b>Sodium</b> 55mg	2%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 30g	12%
Dietary Fiber 2g	
Sugars 23g	
<b>Protein</b> 4g	8%

\*Percentage Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

**Ingredients:** Cream, Skim Milk, Liquid Sugar, Water, Egg Yolks, Brown Sugar, Milkfat, Peanut Oil, Sugar, Butter, Salt, Carrageenan, Vanilla Extract.

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# Health Literacy Jeopardy



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# Questions?

Discussion?



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