



Health Literacy Toolkit

Health literacy is defined 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 to prevent or treat illness.¹

Consider every patient as having low health literacy; do not judge patients' status by their level of perceived "regular" literacy, communication skills or education. A patient may have high levels in all or some of these areas, and may even work in the healthcare industry, and *still* possess low health literacy.

Scientific studies have shown the correlation between patients' health literacy level and health outcomes. Individuals with low health literacy are less likely to get a flu shot, understand medical labels/instructions, and are more likely to take medicines incorrectly compared to adults with higher health literacy.^{2 3}

Use the tools and resources below to assess your practice, raise awareness, and target specific areas in your organization to improve the health outcomes and experience for your patients.

*Resources excerpted from the [Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#) prepared by the North Carolina Network Consortium for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

Assessment

ACTION STEPS	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Convene a team composed of representatives from all practice areas to guide your organization's health literacy improvement efforts. 	Form a Team *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assess health literacy practices in your organization. ■ Identify one person in your facility to evaluate and review patient materials. 	Assess Your Practice *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Assess the reading level of your print materials. 	SMOG (Simple Measures of Gobbledygook) Readability Test
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Test the navigational ease of your facility (walk through the halls, call in with questions, evaluate signage). 	Patient Discharge Process Assessment Tool Pharmacy Health Literacy Assessment Tool
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify areas within your organization to target for improvement. ■ Create an improvement strategy to test changes and evaluate progress and impact. ■ Raise staff awareness of health literacy issues and gain buy-in for improvement initiatives. 	Quality Improvement Workbook Raise Awareness *

Better Communication

ACTION STEPS	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage patients to ask questions. 	Ask Me Three Patient-Centered Care: Focus on Health Literacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Train all staff on clear communication practices. ■ Include health literacy in staff orientation and competency assessments. 	Better Communication for Better Care Tips for Communicating Clearly *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Follow up with your patients to learn if they understand self-care instructions and to evaluate the need for additional intervention. 	Follow-Up With Patients * Telephone Considerations *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create easy-to-understand, written communication tools. 	Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear & Effective Design Easy-to-Read Material *

Patient Education

ACTION STEPS	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware of your patient's cultural needs and wants. 	Welcome Patients: Helpful Attitudes, Signs & More* How to Address Language Differences* Culture & Other Considerations*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate through verbal communication and provide written resources/handouts. 	Use Health Education Material Effectively*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat and have the patient repeat (teach-back) the information. 	The Teach-Back Method* Teach-Back Toolkit Teach-Back Cards Teach-Back Implementation Guide

Community Resources (non-medical support)

ACTION STEPS	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess issues impacting the patient's ability to comply with self-care. Have him/her meet with a case manager or social worker. Involve caregivers in the discussion. Develop a list of community resources tailored to your patient's needs. Create a supportive environment for the patient. 	Link Patients to Non-Medical Support* Medication Resources* Use Health & Literacy Resources in the Community* Community Programs and Resource Contact Information

Medication Management

ACTION STEPS	RESOURCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn if your patients are taking their medications correctly. Remind patients to bring their medication to each visit. Conduct a brown bag review with the patient. Provide patients with an updated medication list (if needed). 	Brown Bag Medication Review* Improve Medication Adherence & Accuracy* Medication Reconciliation Teach-Back Questions How to Read Drug Labels My Medication Profile Tips for Taking Medication History My Medication Concerns Medication Reconciliation: Drug Safety Toolkits

+ Additional Resources

[What did the doctor say?: Improving Health Literacy to Protect Patient Safety](#) – White paper with a call to action to improve health literacy. Includes specific strategies to make effective communications an organizational priority.

[Effective Communication Tools for Healthcare Professionals](#) – Free patient-provider communication online training tools for healthcare professionals.

[AHRQ Health Literacy Tools](#) – Pharmacy-specific tools to assess health literacy, train staff, and educate patients.

[Quick Guide to Health Literacy](#) – Reference guide developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, filled with facts, definitions, helpful tips, checklists and resources for healthcare providers.

[Adult Medication: Improving Medication Adherence in Older Adults](#) – Resources and educational training programs for health care professionals to identify, resolve, and prevent medication non-adherence in the older adult.

¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Health Resources and Services Administration. Available at: www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/healthliteracy/healthlitabout.html. Accessed February, 14 2013.

²Berkman ND, Sheridan SL, Donahue KE, et al. Health Literacy Interventions and Outcomes: An Updated Systematic Review. Evidence Report/Technology Assessment No. 199. Rockville, MD; 2011.

³Bennett IM, Chen J, Soroui J, White S. The Contribution of Health Literacy to Disparities in Self-Rated Health Status and Preventive Health Behaviors in Older Adults. *Annals of Family Medicine*. 2009;7(3):204-211.

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