

Patient-Centered Care: Focus on Health Literacy

When your patients leave your office without any questions, it may seem like they have a good understanding of what steps they should take for their good health—but the fact is that nearly half the U.S. population has difficulty understanding and using health information.¹

The good news is that provider awareness of literacy issues and individual patient needs can help improve patient care. You can help your patients gain a better understanding of important health information by incorporating a more patient-centered approach into your communications.

1. Keep it simple:

- Use plain, everyday language.
- Speak more slowly.
- Break it down into short statements.
- Focus on the 2 or 3 most important concepts.
- Use **teach-back** to check for understanding.

2. Engage patients in their own care.

- Encourage patients to actively discuss their own care; use open-ended questions (“What questions do you have for me?”), rather than Yes/No questions (“Do you have any questions?”).
- Share the **Ask Me 3** approach with patients, and encourage them to understand the answers to: (1) What is my main problem? (2) What do I need to do? and (3) Why is it important for me to do this?²

3. Develop individualized care plans.

- Create a tailored care plan to fit the unique needs of each patient.
- Involve the patient as an active member of the care team.
- Foster deeper patient understanding of health concerns to promote better self-care management.

Teach-Back: Ask patients to repeat, or “teach back” in their own words what they’ve just learned. This approach offers an opportunity to reteach the information, if needed.

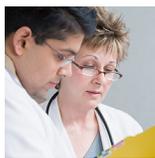
Example: *“I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Can you please explain it back to me so I can be sure I did?”*

Health Literacy Resources:
<http://tiny.cc/hlit>

Free CE Courses:
<http://tiny.cc/CEs>



1. Nielsen-Bohman L, Panzer AM, Kindig DA, eds. Institute of Medicine Committee on Health Literacy. *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2004; 2. National Patient Safety Foundation. *Health Literacy: Statistics At-a-Glance*. Available at: www.npsf.org/askme3/pdfs/STATS_GLANCE_EN.pdf. Accessed June 7, 2010.



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