



## Wisconsin Health Literacy

- Statewide nonprofit organization offering education and training on Health Literacy
- Projects (Medications workshops, Med labels)
- Division of Wisconsin Literacy (77 members)
- Health Literacy Summit (biennial)

[WisconsinHealthLiteracy.org](http://WisconsinHealthLiteracy.org)

## What we'll cover today

- What is health literacy?
- How low health literacy impacts health
- Ways to better engage patients to help increase self-management care

## Which of the following is the single strongest predictor of an individual's health status?

1. Age
2. Income
3. Literacy Skills
4. Employment status
5. Education Level
6. Racial or ethnic group

## What is Health Literacy?

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

—The Institute of Medicine 2004

## How can you tell?

Patients with low health literacy may have difficulty:

- Locating services
- Filling out complex health forms
- Sharing medical history
- Understanding risk
- Managing chronic health conditions

• “I forgot my glasses. I'll read when I get home.”

## Day-to-day problems associated with low health literacy:

Understanding common words:

- Stool
- Growth
- Bowel
- Polyp
- Colon
- Rectum
- Lesion
- Screening

## Day-to-day problems associated with low health literacy:

Patients less likely to know:

- How to use inhaler
- That weight loss & exercise lower blood pressure
- What foods are good to eat
- How to understand direct-to-consumer ads
- How to select a health plan
- How to take medicine

## A real life example...

An 89-year-old man with dementia is diagnosed with an ear infection and is prescribed an oral liquid antibiotic: "one teaspoon twice a day."



-Parker, R. et al. J Health Comm, 2003.

## How low health literacy affects engagement:

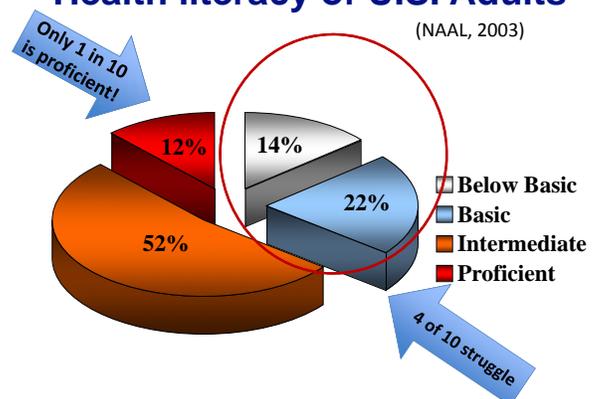
- Difficulty with SDM terminology, e.g., ("benefit" and "harm")
- Less likely to ask questions
- Harder to evaluate online information
- Less activated: more likely to just accept provider advice

## How low health literacy affects engagement:

- Harder to manage chronic disease
- Left behind by technology
- Less likely to rate satisfaction high
- Less likely to access care efficiently (e.g., ED vs. PCP)
- More likely to be readmitted

## Health literacy of U.S. Adults

(NAAL, 2003)



### Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

Ethnicity:

- Entire population 36%
- White 28%
- Native Americans 48%
- Blacks 58%
- Hispanics 66%

### Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

AGE	Proficient	Intermediate	Basic or Below Basic
75+	1%	29%	70%
65+	3%	38%	59%
All Adults	12%	53%	36%

### Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

Education level:

- In High School, GED or HS grad 34-37%
- Less than/some High School 76%

### Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

- 24 million Americans have Limited English Proficiency
- 75-90% of patients in the 2 lowest reading levels describe themselves as being able to read/write English “well” or “very well”
- Adults with limited English Proficiency usually become proficient **speaking/hearing** English long before they become proficient **reading** English

### You can't tell by looking: The difficulty of knowing

- 2013 Study: 63% of patients had high likelihood of limited health literacy – nurses reported 19%
- 2002 Study: Resident physicians perceived 90% did not have literacy problems when 36% had low health literacy

### Medical studies show most people suffer a 68% hearing loss when naked.



## The Impact of Low Health Literacy



## The Impact on Health

- Poorer health knowledge
- Poorer health status
- Higher mortality
- More hospitalizations
- Higher health care costs

### Those with low health literacy are **less likely to:**

Adopt preventive measures, including mammograms, pap smears, flu shots

Participate in preventive services, such as tobacco cessation and obesity prevention programs

## What can nurses do?



### 1 Adopt Health Literacy Universal Precautions

Since you can't always tell by looking...

- Take actions that minimize risk for everyone



### 2 Create Shame-Free Environment



Even highly educated people prefer simple, understandable health information.



## Practice plain, simple language

20% of American adults read at or below the **5th grade** level.



Most health care materials are written above the **10th grade** level.

## What is a way to say each of these words in plain language?

Adverse	
Anti-inflammatory	
Carcinogen	
Angina	
Depression	

## What is a way to say each of these words in plain language?

Medical Term	Another way to say
Adverse	Bad
Anti-inflammatory	Helps swelling and irritation go away
Carcinogen	Cancer-causing
Angina	Chest pain
Depression	Feeling sad or down

## It's not just medical terms....

**"I think he's doing much better. We can move him from the ICU to the floor."**

- ICU Physician Consultant



"I heard the hospital was full but couldn't you get me a bed?"

## A word about numbers

- Do the math for patients
- Keep denominator same (5 out of 100, 1 in 10)
- Use frequency (1 out of 10) vs. percent (10%)
- Use comparisons/analogies



## Show or draw pictures



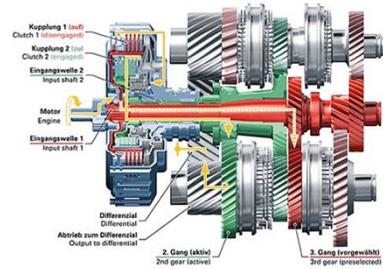
## 5 Slow down

Speak clearly and at a moderate pace.



sorrymyemaillookslkethisbutmycomputerdroppedandmyspacebarbroke

## 6 Limit amount of information provided



Only “need to know” concepts

## 7 Verify understanding using “Teach Back”

- Ask to **demonstrate** understanding

“We have gone over a lot of information today. What will you tell your wife about your diabetes?”

“I want to be sure I explained everything clearly, so can you please show me how you will use your asthma medication when you get home?”

- Do **not** ask: “Do you understand?”

## 8 Engage patients; encourage questions

Ask the right question

- Is there something else you want to address in the visit today?
- Is there anything else you want to address in the visit today?

wisconsin health literacy

# Questions?

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