

# Health Literacy: Definitions and System Approaches

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## Abstract

• Health literacy is the ability of an individual to process health information and use that information to inform their healthcare decisions. Rates are staggeringly low for a large portion of the population. It is an issue that applies to every field of healthcare and to every individual. Understanding how the body functions normally determines how it is treated. Understanding what healthcare professionals are saying when the body functions abnormally determines the patient's level of compliance. Assessing consumers for health literacy is difficult – many do not ask for clarification and there are few who will admit to not understanding. The people who need help are not always the obvious ones. Addressing the issue takes a mixture of patience, thorough understanding, and compassion. In this presentation, we will address what exactly health literacy is, who it affects, common misconceptions, how to assess consumers at all levels, and the best methods for education.

## Overview

- What is health literacy?
- Why is important?
- Common misconceptions
- Patient education
- Chronic care model and health literate care model

## What is Health Literacy and Why is it important?

- "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."  
  - Ratzan and Parker, 2000
- Provider visits
- New medications
- Diagnoses of self, family, and friends
- Finding resources

Mayer, 2007

## Common Misconceptions

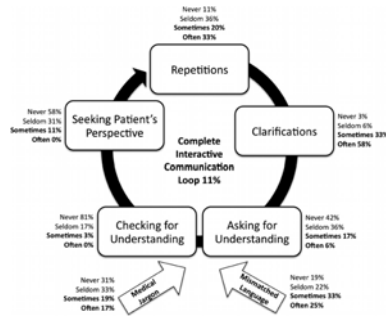
- If I ask my patients if they understand, they'll be offended
- Patients with low health literacy are poorly educated
- If I explain things slowly and clearly, they'll understand
- My patients all speak fluent English, so low literacy isn't a problem
- They said they understood and didn't have any questions, my work here is done.

Mayer, 2007

## Bill Coombs



## The Communication Loop



Al Sayah, 2014, and Schillinger, 2003

## The Consequences

- What happens if patients continue to have low health literacy?
  - Acute
    - Medication errors
    - Erroneous self-cares
    - Return visits
  - Chronic
    - High risk for chronic disease and hypertension
    - More likely to be overweight or obese
    - Less likely to exercise and eat well
    - Increased health costs

Cawthon, 2014  
McNaughton, 2014  
Joshi, 2014

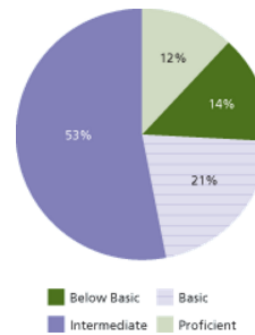
## Population Health Literacy

- Health literacy assessment focuses on the individual
- Critical health literacy
- Need to develop a framework for addressing health literacy needs of population groups
- Health literacy assessment has focused on functional health literacy of individuals in clinical settings



Guzys et al., 2015

Figure 1. Adults' Health Literacy Level: 2003



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

## Health Literacy Universal Precautions Model

Agency for Health Care Research and Quality—US Department of Health and Human Services (2010)




Form a team	Assess your practice
Communicate clearly	Teach-back method
Telephone considerations	Brown bag med review
Culture competence	Easy-to-read materials
Welcome patients	Encourage questions
Improve med adherence	Get patient feedback
Medication resources	Link patients to community resources
Follow-up with patients	Raise awareness
Language differences	Use health ed effectively
Make action plans	Use health literacy resources in the community




## TOOLS




## Expanded Chronic Care Model






Barr et al., 2003

Delivery System Design/Re-orient Health Services	Definition	Care Model Examples	Health Literate Care Model
	 Healthcare activated to be advocates for health. Delivery system supports population health promotion. Supports individuals and communities in a holistic way.	 1. Advocacy on behalf of vulnerable populations. Emphasis on quality improvement and quality of life outcomes. (ECCM) 2. Team members proactively schedule appts. and send reminders. Actively recruit patients for group visits. (CCM)	 Brown bag medication review is incorporated into workflow  Team members follow up to verify patients' comprehension of care plans.

Self-Management/Develop Personal Skills	Definition	Care Model Examples	Health Literate Care Model
	 Emphasis on the importance of the central role that patients have in managing their own care.	 Smoking Prevention and cessation programs. Seniors' walking programs. (ECCM)  Members of team are trained in Motivational Interviewing. (CCM)	 Teach-back method used in every patient interaction.  All self management support follow principles of plain language and health literacy.

Decision Support	Definition	Care Model Examples	Health Literate Care Model
	 Integration of evidence-based guidelines into daily clinical practice.	 Development of health promotion and prevention best practice guidelines. (ECCM)  Patient encounters include prompts and care is delegated using protocols such as standing orders. (CCM)	 The team provides self paced, interactive decision making conversations with patients.

Information Systems	Definition	Care Model Examples	Health Literate Care Model
	 Developing information systems based on patient population to provide relevant client data.	 Use broad community-based information systems to include community data beyond the health care system (social determinants). (ECCM)  Disease registries and clinical reminder systems. (CCM)	 Teams receive reminders for health literacy related tasks  Personal health records include patients' care plans, health literate decision aids, self management tools, and links to community resources.

Conclusion	Conclusion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although health literacy is an individual / personal issue, it affects large groups of people</li> <li>Large problems require adaptive solutions based in systems approaches</li> <li>Must consider frameworks that apply to individual, institutions, and communities</li> <li>HEALTH LITERACY IS A COMMUNITY PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS</li> </ul>





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