

# Managing Chronic Care through Health Literacy

National Health Literacy Month

**Diana Carr, MA**  
Cultural & Linguistic Specialist

*Coverage for  
every stage of life™*

# Learning Objectives



[www.PSDgraphics.com](http://www.PSDgraphics.com)

- ❖ Identify who is at risk for low health literacy.
- ❖ Identify low literacy strategies that could be used to support patients with chronic conditions.
- ❖ Identify resources to assist patients with low health literacy

# Define health literacy verses low literacy

## Health literacy

- struggles with specialized health care vocabulary and concepts
- find it difficult to understand numeracy such as how to determine when to take medications
- Not exclusively related to education level or experience

## Low literacy

- struggles to read printed materials
- difficulty understanding mathematical concepts and functions (divide, multiple)
- Result of poor education opportunities

# Low Health Literacy

# Is it possible that your patients struggle with low health literacy?

- ❑ 50% of ENGLISH speaking adults lack the literacy skills to understand and act on medical information



- ❑ Average reading level among American English speaking adults – 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade



- ❑ 12% of adults have proficient reading skills.



# Signs of Low Health Literacy



**Difficulty filling  
out forms  
completely.**

**“I forgot my  
glasses.”**

**“I’ll take this  
home for my  
son/daughter to  
help me.”**

**Difficulty  
managing  
medications.**

**Has no  
questions.**

# Why Address Low Health Literacy?

- ❖ Patients struggling with health literacy are more likely to seek medical help when illness is advanced or urgent.
- ❖ More success in managing chronic conditions.



# Health Literacy is Linked to Health Outcomes



**Poor glyceemic control**



**More reported diabetes complications.**



**More likely to report poorer health.**



**More difficulty understanding prescription instructions and managing multiple drugs**



# AMA Foundation Video

## [Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confused Patients](#)







**Physician managed health care is based on imparting directions for the patient to follow.**

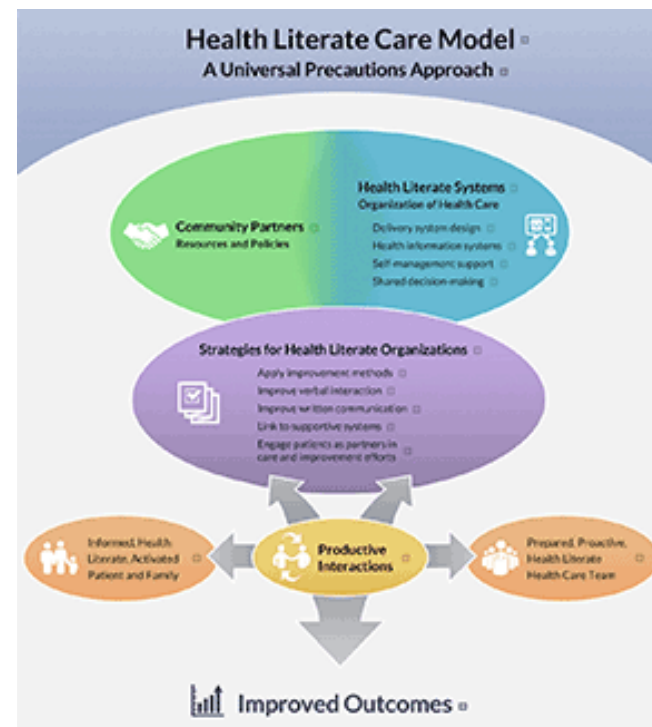


**Patient managed health care is based on assuring that the patient knows what they need to do.**

# Health Literate Care Model

Calls for health care providers to:

- Approach all patients as if they are at risk of not understanding health information
- Employ a range of strategies for clear communication
- Confirm that patients understand what providers are saying



Materials from Health.gov – [url](https://health.gov/communication/interactiveHLCM/)  
<https://health.gov/communication/interactiveHLCM/>

# Strategies

# Reduce the Cognitive Load of Reading Materials

- Cognitive function or working memory is the basis of health literacy.
- Select patient education materials written at a 6th to 8th grade reading level.
- Material should:
  - Balance use of images and words
  - Be distraction free
- What the patient should DO should be in the first few sentences of material.
- Black words on yellow background reduces cognitive processing time.
- 7 is the magic number.



**Bumble Bee**

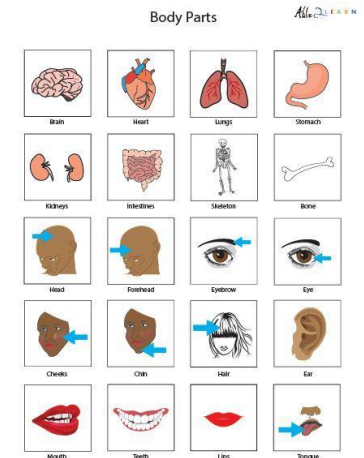
# Create a Shame Free Environment

- ❖ Can you repeat that back to me so that we both understand the same thing?
- ❖ Before the patient leaves with a new prescription, provide supportive counseling on side effects or possible interactions with existing medications;
- ❖ ask the patient how the new medication will fit their current schedule.
- ❖ Medication review as part of patient intake for patients managing multiple medications.



# Create a Shame Free Environment for Culturally Diverse Patients

- ❖ Visual aids relevant to the chronic condition – pictures of inhalers or exact pills that patient takes.
- ❖ Communicate in plain language. Replace medical jargon.
- ❖ Ask discovery questions – What are the 5 things you like about X, 5 things dislike?





# Create a Shame Free Environment for Culturally Diverse Patients

- ❖ I have asked you so many questions, do you have any for me?
- ❖ Ask Me 3 – posters and brochures in English and Spanish.
- ❖ Patient elicitation – What do you think caused your condition?  
What can you do to manage your condition?
- ❖ Use sketches.

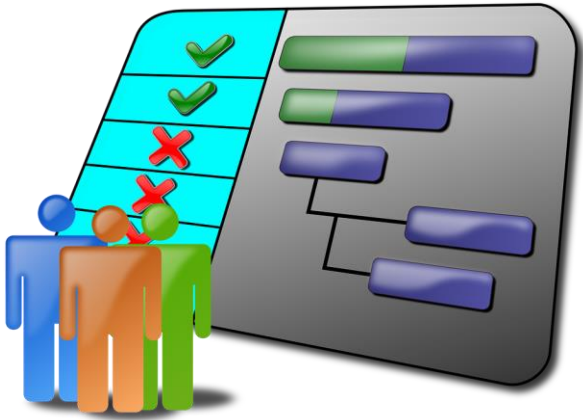


# Do your patients tell you stories when you ask them a question?

- ❖ Stories increase long term memory retention.
- ❖ Patients with low health literacy are more likely to use stories to explain their illness or symptoms.
- ❖ Listen for the main points to repeat back to the patient for verification.
- ❖ Obstacles and possible management clues are often in the story.



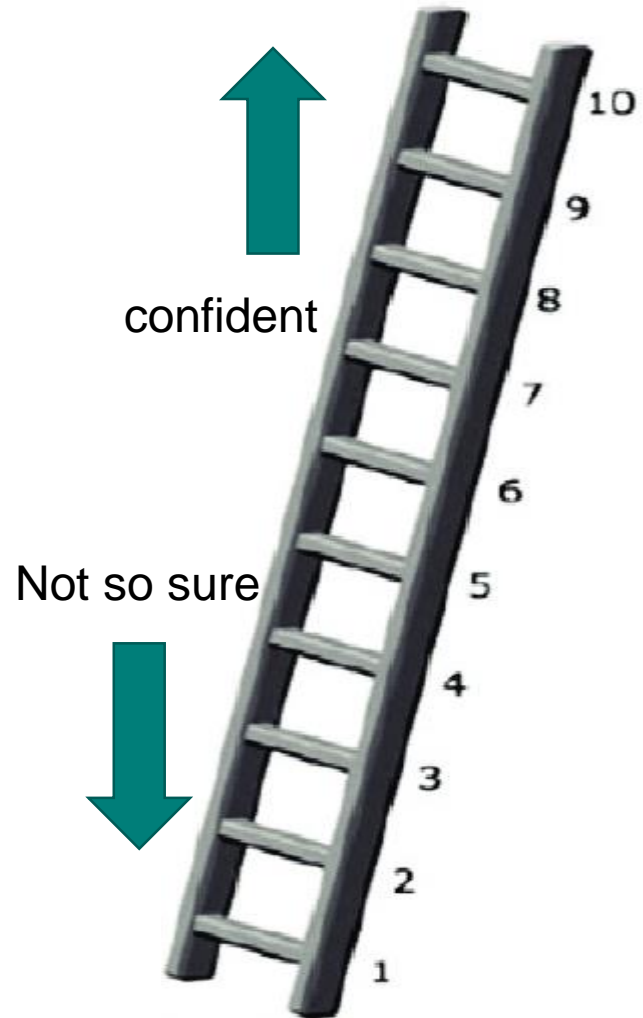
# Develop a “Need to Do” Action Plan



- Less than 50% remember physician’s instructions less than an hour after leaving the office.
- Choose one item at a time to focus on for behavior change.
- Ask the patient – ‘What are you certain that you can do?’
- Be specific- how much, by when
- Tie outcome to something that is personally enjoyable to the patient

# Scale Evaluation of Action Plan

- ✓ Use a scale metaphor, such as a ladder or stairs.
- ✓ On a scale of 0 to 10, 10 being absolutely confident: How confident are you that you will be able to do \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.
- ✓ Want greater than 7 before send patient home with the action plan.



# Follow Up with Patient on Action Plan

- ❖ After about 10 days, call patient and ask how the action plan is doing?
- ❖ 50%-70% remember the details of their action plan.
- ❖ 50%-70% adhere to the action plan with follow up.



# Journal or notebook

- ❖ Provide a steno book or small notebook to patients
- ❖ Write any sketches or notes in the notebook. Put a date by the notes.
- ❖ Ask the patient
  - ❖ to have other doctors that they may be seeing for related conditions write brief notes in the notebook.
  - ❖ To note their progress, side effects, successes, questions in the notebook.
  - ❖ Consider asking anyone that is supporting the patient to add in notes.

# Improve Health Literacy to Improve Chronic Care



- ❖ Patients manage care successful when patients know what they need to do and are motivated to do it.

Convert motivational statements into information meaningful to the patient.

- ❖ “You will have fewer sick days from work” instead of “You will feel better.”
- ❖ What you think you know about patients – category words and terms.



# Use of Metaphors or Analogies

Use **familiar** examples to the patient:



Gardening



Cars



Weather



Sports



Family

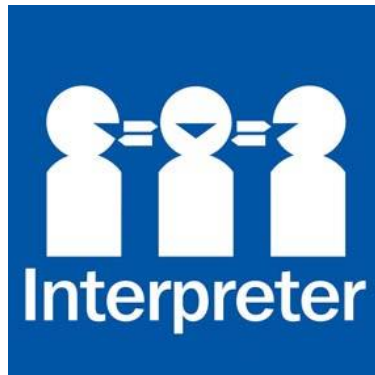
Taking medicines on a regular basis is like watering a garden. If you wait until the plants are a little wilted, it's too late. Water every day.

Altoona list of medical analogies - [url](http://www.altoonafp.org/analogies)  
<http://www.altoonafp.org/analogies>



# Language as a Barrier to Health Literacy

- ❖ Some of the same strategies are effective for language barriers – sketches, visual aids.



- ❖ Use of interpreter services.

# Ask Me 3

Health information is not clear at times. The Ask Me 3 program run by the National Patient Safety Foundation/ Institute for Healthcare Improvement can help.

The Ask Me 3 program gives patients three questions to ask their health care provider during a health care visit, either for themselves or for a loved one. They are:

- What is my main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

Asking questions can help you be an active member of your health care team.

# Be a part of the health literacy ripple

**Be a Health Literacy Hero**



**Celebrate National Health Literacy Month!**

Click here to learn more!

<http://www.healthliteracymonth.org>

National Health Literacy Month - [url](http://www.healthliteracymonth.org/what-is-a-health-literacy-hero/)  
<http://www.healthliteracymonth.org/what-is-a-health-literacy-hero/>

# Summary

- ❖ Low health literacy is linked to poor health outcomes.
- ❖ You can't tell by looking.
- ❖ Simple strategies to identify low health literacy.
- ❖ Strategies to address low health literacy.
- ❖ Strategies to improve patient management of chronic conditions.



# Resources

AMA Foundation health literacy videos - [url](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGtTZ_vxjyA)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGtTZ\\_vxjyA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGtTZ_vxjyA)

National Assessment of Adult Literacy - [url](https://nces.ed.gov/naal/)  
<https://nces.ed.gov/naal/>

Medical analogies - [url](http://www.altoonafp.org/sites/default/files/Analogies.pdf)  
<http://www.altoonafp.org/sites/default/files/Analogies.pdf>

Plain Language - [url](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)  
<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>

Health.gov - [url](https://health.gov/communication/interactiveHLCM/)  
<https://health.gov/communication/interactiveHLCM/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - [url](https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy>

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Health Literacy Universal Precautions toolkit - [url](https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html)  
<https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>

Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) - [url](http://www.iha4health.org)  
<http://www.iha4health.org>

# Thank you!

*Don't forget to fill out your  
evaluation. 😊*