Do you speak plain language?
Exploring Health Literacy for OT Professionals

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What is health literacy?

Health Literacy is:

- your health
- health & health care information
- your health decisions
- making decisions together
- taking health action
- feeling good about your health

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

www.safetyandquality.gov.au
Why health literacy is important

Low health literacy affects how you:

- Seek support
- Navigate the health system
- Understand nutrition
- Organise health care appointments
- Understand medical instructions
- Analyse risks and benefits of treatments
- Complete paperwork

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

www.safetyandquality.gov.au
9 out of 10:
Number of adults who struggle with health literacy

Source: Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

99% of Americans can read

BUT

only 12% are health literate
Annual National Assessment results 2012

Level 1

0 – 29%
this test mark means the learner did not achieve the basic requirements.

This was the achievement level with the highest percentages

42.3%  
42.3% of Grade 9 learners scored between 0 – 29% for their First Additional Language

24.7%  
24.7% of Grade 9 learners scored between 0 – 29% for their Home Language

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

2011

- Grade 4 learners, particularly those tested in African languages, achieved well below the International Centre point despite writing an easier assessment
- 43% of Grade 5 learners failed to reach the Low International Benchmark – this is an indication of not having mastered basic reading skills

Source: http://citizen.co.za/31407/literatez/
Layers of Complexity

- Multi-generational
- Multi-cultural
- Multi-lingual
- Low health literacy

Multiple implications for clear health communication
Motivation: JUST and INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

1. **Understand** the concept of health literacy and its impact on people’s health,

2. **Utilize effective communication strategies** to **enable** clients’ understanding of and access to health information,

3. **Contribute to knowledge transfer** initiatives to **facilitate clients’ access** to accurate, personally relevant health information,

4. **Support its use** in life’s daily occupations and roles,

5. **Advocate** with inter-professional teams on ways to increase a clients’ participation in shared decision-making” (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT, 2013; Levasseur & Carrier (2010, 2012))
Basic information about a colonoscopy, as perceived by a patient with limited literacy skills

Your naicisyhp has dednemnocer that you have a ypocsonoloc. Ypocsonoloc is a test for noloc recnac. It sevlovni gnitresni a elbixelf gniweiv epocs into your mutcer. You must drink a laiceps diuqil the thgin erofeb the noitanimaxe to naelc out your noloc.
April 16, 2016

Dear _________
Your bloodwork is unremarkable without any signs to suggest parasitic infection, inflammation of blood vessels or other problems. I suspect your symptoms are functional in nature and not due to a specific disease process. I doubt that further testing would be productive. You may want to consider getting a second opinion and I would be happy to assist in arranging one. Please let me know if I can be of help in that regard.

Sincerely,
Dr XYZ

Years of formal education to easily understand this text = 10.8
## Categories of health activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health activities</th>
<th>Examples of materials</th>
<th>Examples of tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Promotion</td>
<td>Articles, charts, graphs, lists, food &amp; product labels</td>
<td>Purchase food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plan exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Protection</td>
<td>Articles, health &amp; safety warnings, air &amp; water quality reports, elections</td>
<td>Decide amongst product options, use products, vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disease Prevention</td>
<td>News alerts, vaccinations, screenings, letters of test results, graphs, charts</td>
<td>Determine risk, engage in screening or diagnostic tests, follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care &amp; Maintenance</td>
<td>Health history forms, medicine labels, discharge instructions, educational booklets &amp; brochures</td>
<td>Describe &amp; measure symptoms, follow directions on medicine labels, calculate timing for medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Navigation</td>
<td>Access needed services – maps, bus schedules, application forms, statement of rights &amp; responsibilities, informed consent</td>
<td>Locate facilities &amp; professionals, apply for benefits, offer informed consent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity analysis: Take Medicine

Activity: Take Medicine A

Tasks: Read a label, differentiate between medicine A from medicine B. Read directions, follow directions, measure or count, plan timing around meals or day of the week

Tools: Label, instructions
Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults: TOFHLA

Numeracy (17 items)

Abbocillin VK Tablets 250mg 50
Take ONE tablet by mouth four times a day

Mr Ian Garfield nil Rpts
16/04/06 Dr Michael Lubin FF941858 $11.53

Q1. If you take your first tablet at 7.00am, when should you take the next one? __________

Q2. And the next one after that? __________

Numeracy:
Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults (TOFHLA) (Parker et al., 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GARFIELD IM</th>
<th>16 Apr 93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FF941862 Dr. LUBIN, MICHAEL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DOXYCYCLINE**
100 mg    20/0

Take medication on empty stomach one hour before or two to three hours after a meal unless otherwise directed by your doctor.

02 11      (0 of 20)

*Interviewer: If you eat lunch at 12:00 noon, and you want to take this medicine before lunch, what time should you take it?*
REALM
Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine

- Word recognition test
- Quick and easy to administer
- Participant says each word out loud. Scored on number pronounced correctly
  61-66: not low lit
  45-60: grade 7-8
  19-44: grade 4-6
  0-18: grade 3 or below
- Doesn’t matter if they know the word’s meaning

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Davis T, Long S, et al
Rapid estimate of adult literacy in medicine: a shortened screening instrument
Fam Med. 1993; 25: 391-395
Newest Vital Sign

The “SMOG” Readability Test
(Short Version)

For materials containing > 30 sentences

1. Count off 10 consecutive sentences at the beginning, middle and end of the text.
2. Count the number of words with 3 or more syllables in the 30-sentence sample.
   Answer: 
3. Use the answer to step 2 to look up the reading grade level in the chart.

For materials containing ≤ 30 sentences

1. Count the number of sentences: 
2. Count the number of words with 3 or more syllables in the sample: 
3. Divide the number of sentences in the sample into 30 (i.e., 30/25) and multiply this number by the number of words from step 2.
   Answer: 
4. Use the answer to step 3 to look up the reading grade level in the chart.

Note:
- A sentence is defined as a string of words punctuated with a period, exclamation point, or question mark.
- Hyphenated words are considered one word.
- Numbers should be considered as if they were written out (i.e. both “25” and “twenty-five” should be considered to have 3 or more syllables).
- Proper nouns should be considered.
- Abbreviations should be considered in their unabbreviated form.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of ...</th>
<th>Try this ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(You may need to use different forms or combinations depending on how the term is used)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Synonym(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abdomen</td>
<td>stomach, tummy, belly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abrasion</td>
<td>scrape, scratch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absorb</td>
<td>take in fluids, soak up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abstain from</td>
<td>don't, don't use, don't have, go without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accompany</td>
<td>go (along) with, come with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accomplish</td>
<td>carry out, do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accordingly</td>
<td>so, for that reason, as a result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accrue</td>
<td>add, gain, build up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accumulate</td>
<td>add, build up, collect, gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accurate</td>
<td>correct, exact, right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use “Showback”, when appropriate

Demonstrate, then ask for family to demonstrate back to you (“showback”)

- “I want to make sure I explained how to give the medicine clearly. Can you use this syringe to show me how much medicine you will give Juan?”
Your baby has an ear infection and the doctor puts him on Amoxicillin 3 times a day (see bottle). Using the picture of the dropper, please show how much medicine you would administer for one dose of this medication.

Among parents of young children, about what percent answer this question **incorrectly**?

A. 10%
B. 20%
C. 33%
D. 50%  

N = 358

Lokker, Sanders, et al Acad Ped 2009
Teach Back

BEGIN

EXPLAIN NEW CONCEPT

ASK PATIENT TO REPEAT OR DEMONSTRATE

CLARIFY ANY MISUNDERSTANDING

ASK PATIENT TO REPEAT OR DEMONSTRATE
Teach-Back . . . How?

Ask patients to demonstrate understanding
- “What will you tell your spouse about your condition?”
- “I want to be sure I explained everything clearly, so can you please explain it back to me so I can be sure I did.”
- “Show me what you would do.”

Chunk and check
Summarize and check for understanding throughout, don’t wait until the end.

Do NOT ask . . .
- “Do you understand?”
"Take with meals? No problem! I eat all the time!"
First Impressions consists of three activities and focuses on first impressions shaped by a phone call, a visit to the web page, and the walk to the entrance. The full set of activities set the stage for an examination of your facility through new eyes.
Be a Health Literacy Hero!
References


