Choosing Effective Health Education Tools To Reach Your Patients

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Thursday, November 20th, 3:30pm – 5:00pm
Learning Objectives

- Understand health literacy and how it impacts health education
- Recognize key risk factors and behaviors of limited literacy
- Improve strategies for conveying clear health education messages
- Identify the principles for creating and assessing effective health education tools
A two-year old is diagnosed with an inner ear infection and prescribed an antibiotic. Her mother understands that her daughter should take the prescribed medication twice a day. After carefully studying the label on the bottle she decides that it doesn’t tell how to take the medicine. She fills a teaspoon and pours the antibiotic into her daughter’s ear.

Source: Literacy Volunteers of America
Health Literacy: Definitions

“read, understand and act”

“make appropriate decisions”

“obtain, process, and understand information”

Sources: Institute of Medicine, Healthy People 2020, American Medical Association
What is Health Literacy?

- Reading ability is the strongest factor, but it is NOT simply the ability to read.

- Health literacy requires a complex group of reading, listening, analytical and decision-making skills and the ability to apply these skills to health situations.

- Assumes an advanced level of knowledge.
Skills Needed in Health Care

- Access Information
- Recognize cues to action
- Access Care
- Navigate Institutions
- Complete Forms

- Provide Consent
- Communicate with professionals
- Provide info for assessment & diagnosis
- Understand directions
- Follow regimen
- Advocate

Source: Rudd, RE. Literacy and implications for navigating healthcare, 2002. Harvard School of Public Health: Health Literacy Website www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy

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What do the Pictures Really Mean??

- **DO NOT CHEW OR CRUSH, SWALLOW WHOLE.**
- **YOU SHOULD AVOID PROLONGED OR EXCESSIVE EXPOSURE TO DIRECT AND/OR ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT WHILE TAKING THIS MEDICATION.**
- **SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING**
- **FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY**
- **MEDICATION SHOULD BE TAKEN WITH PLENTY OF WATER**
- **TAKE WITH FOOD**

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2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

Source: http://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp

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2003 NAAL found that...

- 33% Were unable to read basic health care materials
- 42% Could not comprehend directions for taking medication on an empty stomach
- 26% Were unable to understand information on an appointment slip
- 86% Did not understand the rights and responsibilities section of a Medicaid application
- 60% Did not understand a standard informed consent
- 78% Misinterpret warnings on prescription labels

Directly Impacts Health Outcomes

- Patients struggle to understand basic medical forms, instructions and health prevention information
- Patients more likely to have a chronic condition and less likely to get care they need
- Patients use more health care services, and incur higher health care costs
- Poorer health status higher among patients with low health literacy
Financial Consequences for Health Care System

- It is up to the health care system to be sure patients understand the information they receive well enough to apply it
- Estimated $32 to $58 billion in additional costs
- Patients with low literacy use more health care services, and use more publically financed health care services

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A Legal Concern for Health Care Professionals

- Poor compliance with medication and care can be dangerous to patients’ lives
- It is up to the health care system to be sure patients understand the information they receive well enough to apply it
How does health literacy impact your work?
Who is at Risk of Low Health Literacy?

- Anyone—regardless of age, race, education, income or social class—can be at risk for low health literacy.

- However, the following populations do have a higher risk due to difficulty reading:
  - Older adults
  - Lower income and education level
  - Minority populations
  - Limited English proficiency (LEP)

EXERCISE

HEALTH LITERACY ASSESSMENT FORM
## Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount per 2/3 cup</th>
<th>Calories 230</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% DV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Total Fat</td>
<td>8g</td>
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<tr>
<td>5% Saturated Fat</td>
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<tr>
<td>0% Trans Fat</td>
<td>0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% Cholesterol</td>
<td>0mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% Sodium</td>
<td>160mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Total Carbs</td>
<td>37g</td>
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<tr>
<td>14% Dietary Fiber</td>
<td>4g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugars</td>
<td>1g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added Sugars</td>
<td>0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>3g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Vitamin D</td>
<td>2mcg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% Calcium</td>
<td>260mg</td>
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<tr>
<td>45% Iron</td>
<td>8mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Potassium</td>
<td>235mg</td>
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</table>

* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.
“Informal Assessment” of Patient Health Literacy

- Most patients do not admit to having reading difficulty
- Practitioners are often surprised at the poor reading skills of some of their most verbally articulate patients
- Must make careful observations
Have you noticed…?

✓ Incomplete patient satisfaction forms or registration forms
✓ Unable to name medications
✓ Bring in a family member to speak for them
✓ Make excuses to not fill out forms
✓ Medication non-adherence
✓ Just nod their head in understanding/silence during appt or conversation
✓ Frequently missed appointments
✓ Member taking a passive role in his or her care.
Responses that may indicate limited literacy

• Responses to receiving written information:
  ✓ “I forgot my glasses. I’ll read this when I get home.”
  ✓ “I forgot my glasses. Can you read this to me?”
  ✓ “Let me bring this home so I can discuss it with my children.”

• Responses to questions about medication regimens:
  ✓ Unable to name medications
  ✓ Unable to explain medication’s purpose
  ✓ Unable to explain timing of medication administration
Coping mechanisms of patients with low literacy

- Ask Other Patients: 80%
- Ask for Help From Staff: 90%
- Watch/Copy Others’ Actions: 88%
- Bring Someone Who Can Read: 98%

Source: Parikh et al., 1996
Two Components of Effective Health Education

- Clear Health Education Message
  - Verbal
  - Written

- Effective Health Education Tool
  - Written
  - Digital

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Communicating a Clear Health Message

1) Create a shame-free environment
2) Cover only the most important information
3) Involve the reader/patient
4) Use easy-to-understand, plain language
5) Incorporate visuals that clarify and motivate
1. Create a shame-free environment

- Be respectful, caring and sensitive
- Make patients comfortable asking questions
- Involve others (patient’s family, friends) to promote understanding
- If the patient does not understand correctly, assume that you have not provided adequate teaching
- Re-teach the information using alternate approaches
- Provide a private area to review information
2. Cover only the most important information

- Have just one or two learning objectives to limit content
- Explain purpose and benefits from patient's viewpoint
- Information is best remembered when it is given in small pieces
- Repetition further enhances recall
- Review key points
3. Involve the reader/patient

- Build opportunity for interaction, such as questions that ask the reader to pause and respond (ex. quiz)
- Emphasize desired actions and behaviors
- Spell out useful, realistic action steps
- Connect with patient’s culture, age and gender through relevant examples and visuals
4. Use easy-to-understand, plain language

- Use common, non-technical language
- Explain things as you would explain them to a family member
- Conversational style with active voice
- Put context first
- Avoid long and complex sentences
Reducing Health Jargon

**Instead of using this word:**
- Benign
- Cardiac
- Edema
- Fatigue
- Screening
- Intake
- Generic
- Adverse Effects

**Consider using this one:**
- Harmless
- Heart
- Swelling, build up of fluid
- Tired
- Test
- What you eat or drink
- Not a name brand
- Side Effects
GROUP EXERCISE

REDUCING JARGON
5. Incorporate visuals that clarify and motivate

- Use pictures, illustrations, diagrams that contribute to your message
- Visual images can improve the patient's recall of ideas
- Select realistic visuals; minimize distracting details
- Use action captions
- Explain lists, charts and give examples
Developing a clear health education message

Ask yourself:

- Why are you writing this material?
- What does the reader really “need to know”?
- What information is essential?
- What behavior is the reader to perform? What do you want the reader TO DO?”
GROUP EXERCISE

SIMPLIFYING A HEALTH EDUCATION MESSAGE
### What can I do to treat my allergies?

The best way to prevent allergy symptoms is to stay away from those things that cause the allergy but this is not always possible. That is why most people with allergies need to take medicines. The medicines that doctors use to treat the symptoms of allergies are called **antihistamines**. Some examples of brand-name antihistamines are *Zyrtec* and *Claritin*. You can buy antihistamines with or without a prescription. They are available in brand-name and in generic form.

### ¿Qué puedo hacer para tratar mis alergias?

La mejor manera de prevenir los síntomas de las alergias es alejarse de esas cosas que causan la alergia pero esto no es siempre posible. Por esto, la mayoría de las personas con alergias necesitan tomar medicinas. Las medicinas que los doctores usan para tratar los síntomas de la alergia se llaman **antihistamínicos**. Algunos ejemplos de antihistamínicos de marca son *Zyrtec* y *Claritin*. Usted puede comprar antihistamínicos con o sin receta médica. Están disponibles en forma genérica y de marca.
Choosing Effective Health Education Tools

- On average, adult Americans read between 8th and 9th grade level
- One out of five American adults reads at the 5th grade level or below
- Most health materials are written at 10th grade level or above
- Effective health education tools help to bridge this gap
The goal of health education is to change behavior...

...so effective health education tools need to be action oriented!
Content

- Have just one or two objectives: what patient really needs to learn and do
- Avoid information overload
- Emphasize behavior rather than facts
- Review and summarize actions – what to do
Writing style

- Reading level – 6th grade or below
- Use common words
- Short paragraphs and sentences (8-10 words), but not “choppy”
- Active voice, conversational language, use examples
- Avoid tables and graphs, except for very simple with clear labels

Reading Level Examples

9th grade level:
“One of your doctor’s primary roles is to prescribe and monitor the use of your asthma medicines. Medications, when taken correctly and combined with appropriate lifestyle changes, can effectively control your asthma.”

6th grade level:
“Both you and your doctor will check on how your medicines are working. When you take the right medicine, in the right way, you can control your asthma. Of course you will also need to deal with the things in your life that bring on the asthma.”
Appearance

- Keep a lot of empty, white space
- Use clear headings to separate text; bullets instead of paragraphs
- Large font (minimum 12 point) with serifs (font with little horizontal lines at the bottom of letters)
- Consistency in style (no more than 2 or 3 font styles on a page)
- Avoid italics, stylish font and all uppercase

Source: Weiss, B.D. 2003
Appeal

- Age and culture appropriate
- Illustrations/pictures that depict common, easy-to-recognize objects
- Use illustrations that emphasize the message
- Define and involve the audience (user testing)

Source: Weiss, B.D. 2003
What You Need to Know About Low Blood Sugar

Treat low blood sugar quickly. If you have signs of low blood sugar, eat or drink something that has sugar in it. Some things you can eat are hard candy, sugar-sweetened soda, orange juice, or a glass of milk. Special tablets or gel made of glucose (a form of sugar) can be used to treat low blood sugar. You can buy these in a drug store. Always have some of these items handy at home or with you when you go out in case your blood sugar drops too low. After treating a low blood sugar reaction, eat a small snack like half a sandwich, a glass of milk, or some crackers if your next meal is more than 30 minutes away.

Source: The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
Example of Effective Health Education Tool

- Common visual used to explain concept
- Uses action captions that clarify the point of the visual
- Creates interaction with the reader
Pain can be treated. It should not ruin your life.
Set goals for treatment with your doctor.
What would be a good pain goal for you?
How would it change your life?

Use the pain scale above to measure your pain and write down how you feel several times a day. Discuss the results with your doctor.

Tell Your Doctor if you have trouble sleeping, or feel sad or nervous. These problems can make pain worse.

Ask Your Doctor about different treatments for different kinds of pain.

Tell Your Doctor if the treatment does not work or if your medicines cause side effects such as nausea, constipation, sleepiness or itching.

Supported by a grant from Endo Pharmaceuticals Inc.

* From Wong's Essentials of Pediatric Nursing, ed. 7, © 2005 Mosby
GROUP EXERCISE

ASSESSING HEALTH EDUCATION TOOLS
Different Types of Effective Health Education Tools

- **Written**
  - Mini-Lesson
  - Newspaper/variety
  - Consumer factsheet

- **Visual Tools**
  - Poster
  - Flipchart
  - Model
  - Fotonovelas

- **Activity**
  - Games and Role Play
  - Theater and Song
  - Storytelling

- **Audiovisual Tools**
  - Video
  - Interactive multimedia
  - Digital stories
Thank You for Your Participation!

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