Health Literacy: Why It Matters and What You Can Do

Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health
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Health Care Improvement Foundation
Health Care Improvement Foundation

• An independent, nonprofit organization that drives high-value health care through stakeholder collaboration and targeted quality improvement initiatives

• Focused on health literacy since 2010, with funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Health

• Lead organization in the formation of the Pennsylvania Health Literacy Coalition
“How Does an HSA Work?”

Your HSA is combined with an IRS-qualified High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP). An HDHP typically offers lower insurance premiums in exchange for higher deductibles. You can use your HSA to pay for many of your plan expenses, including doctor and hospital visits, copayments, prescriptions, and medical equipment. Find a complete list of eligible expenses in Publication 502 at irs.gov.

You can use your HSA funds to pay for nonqualified expenses, but the dollars are subject to ordinary tax plus a 20 percent penalty. This penalty does not apply if you are over age 65 or disabled, but ordinary income tax may still apply.
For the bitewing x-rays, 1 in 12 months for age 14 and older, is that for both sides of the mouth?

- Yes.

Is there a difference between posterior teeth vs. 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} molars?

- Yes bicuspids or premolars are also considered posterior teeth.

Basic restorative—not within 12 months of previous placement? (What does this mean? And what is covered?)

- Fillings are eligible for coverage once per tooth, per 12 months.
Design of Materials

Quality of Copying
Only 14% of U.S. workers can correctly define common insurance terms like deductible, copay, coinsurance and out-of-pocket maximum.
The healthcare process is complex...

Inspired by the “Continuum of Confusion,” American Medical Association Foundation, 2007
...and communication challenges make it even harder to navigate.

Patients are lost in a "continuum of care" and fall into a cycle of crisis care.

Sick patient seeks medical help

- Patient is discharged and no one follows up with patient
- Hospital staff give patient a new treatment plan, referrals and prescriptions; staff do not confirm understanding
- Patient's condition gets worse, and patient goes to the emergency department
- Patient takes medications incorrectly and does not follow up on appointments
- No one follows up with patient

Staff at doctor's office ask patient to complete complex, confusing forms

Doctor explains patient's condition and treatment plan using medical jargon

Doctor writes multiple prescriptions for referrals and tests

Doctor does not confirm patient's understanding

Staff send patient home with complicated set of written instructions

Adapted from: Koh, et al., 2012
What is health literacy?

Health literacy is the ability to **find**, **understand**, **evaluate**, **communicate**, and **use** health information to make **informed decisions** about your health.

Contributing Factors

**Personal & Individual Factors**
- Experience with health system
- General literacy
- Cultural and language factors
- Stress and emotional factors
- Aging
- Fatigue, illness, medications

**System & Situational Factors**
- Complexity of information
- How information is communicated
- Signage, directions, navigation
- Time
You Can’t Tell By Looking.

Certain groups are more likely to show signs of low health literacy...

You are at greater risk if you are:

• Black
• Hispanic
• An older adult
• A non-native English speaker

Only 10% of adults have the skills needed to use health information that is routinely available in healthcare facilities, retail outlets, and the media.

What about the other 90%?

...but almost everyone is at risk.
Not having the needed skills can lead to:

- 4x Health care cost = More $$$
- 6% More trips to the hospital
- 2 More days in the hospital

Partnership for Clear Health Communication at the National Patient Safety Foundation
Health literacy is a stronger predictor of individual health status than age, income, employment status, education level or racial/ethnic group.
Health Literacy: A National Priority

The Affordable Care Act, the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, and the Plain Writing Act all address health literacy as a systems-level challenge.
Health Literacy: A Priority for Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Health Literacy Coalition is working to create a culture of health literacy in the commonwealth.

Funding provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Health.
Health Literacy is Already Happening

And many others:

• Hospitals, health systems, practices, clinics
• Community organizations
• Researchers and academic institutions
• Advocacy organizations
• Patients and consumers
• Government
What’s next for the Coalition?

• Host meetings so people can talk to and learn from each other.
• Form work groups to focus on key topics.
• Write mission, vision, and action plan.
• Create a shared agenda.

Get involved! Sign up for the coalition mailing list to receive updates, or commit to participation by submitting your Commitment Form.
How will you be a health literacy hero?

“Develop health literacy initiatives for limited-English proficient patients.”

“Listen to the needs of the community and be a bridge to provide them with the resources they need most.”

“Bring health literacy to the forefront of hospital administration and collaborate with nursing education.”

“Engage leadership in plain language initiatives.”

“Include the patient’s voice.”
What can I do to address health literacy needs?
How can I tell if someone doesn’t understand?

- Incomplete or inaccurate forms
- Asks to read documentation at home
- Slow reading speed
- Asking others to assist with reading
- “Forgetting glasses”
- Has no questions
Create a Blame Free, Shame Free Environment.

- Screening has the potential for harm and is currently not recommended.
- Create an environment where employees feel comfortable asking questions—a blame free, shame free environment.
- Making information easier to understand will benefit everyone.

Confirm understanding.

**Teach-back** is one communication technique you can use to confirm understanding—but it’s not a **test** of the consumer.
Confirm understanding.

Explain

Assess

Clarify

Understand
Encourage employees to participate in their healthcare.

Prepare for your visit:

- Make a list of questions or concerns
- Gather medications to bring with you or make a list
- Be ready to take notes
Encourage employees to participate in their healthcare.

Free resources to help you ask questions and record answers

- **Be More Involved in Your Health Care:** tips to use before, during, and after your medical appointment to make sure you get the best possible care

- **My Questions for This Visit:** use to list the questions you want to ask during your medical visits.

My Questions for This Visit, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2014.
## Become a Health Literate Organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership makes health literacy integral to mission, structure, and operations</th>
<th>Integrates health literacy into planning and evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepares the workforce to be health literate and monitors progress</td>
<td>Includes populations served in the design, implementation, and evaluation of health information and services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meets the needs of a wide range of populations while avoiding stigmatization</td>
<td>Uses health literacy strategies in communications and confirms understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provides easy access to health information and navigation assistance</td>
<td>Designs and distributes content that is easy to understand and act on</td>
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<td>Addresses health literacy in high risk situations</td>
<td><strong>Communicates clearly what health plans cover and what individuals will have to pay for services</strong></td>
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Collaborate for good communication.

Health literacy and good communication go beyond any one person, profession, program, or organization.

Collaborate for good communication.

Collaborate with your audience, colleagues, and community.

Together, we can improve health understanding!

- **Sick patient seeks medical help**
  - **Patient** is not feeling well
  - **Staff** at doctor's office follow-up regularly with patient
  - **Nurse** gives patient a simple handout and basic tools to use in complying with treatment; staff help plan appointments
  - **Doctor** asks patient to explain the plan back to the doctor in patient's own words
  - **Health-literate care for all patients can break through the continuum of confusion.**
  - **Staff** reminds patient what to bring to the office visit
  - **Staff** at doctor's office give patients simple forms and offer help filling them out
  - As part of assessment, doctor listens to patient describe symptoms
  - **Doctor** describes patient's condition using easy-to-understand terms
  - **Doctor** discusses treatment options with patient and solicits questions

- **Doctor and patient agree on medical plan**
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Resources


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