

Using Everyday Words to Communicate Health & Wellness

Alberta Becenti, MPH



Outline

- Background
- Individual & Organizational Health Literacy
- Why Health Literacy
- Healthy People 2030 Health Literacy Objectives
- IHS Health Literacy Workgroup



safety listening open-communication outcome teach costs
skills questions teach-back care understand pills information

help **HEALTH LITERACY** chunking

read plain language wellness demonstration patient graphs
words family pictures medication slow engage illustration
public culture slow groups words read picture health plan

What is Health Literacy?

Personal health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

Organizational health literacy is the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

<https://health.gov/our-work/healthy-people/healthy-people-2030/health-literacy-healthy-people-2030>

Why is Health Literacy Important?

- Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy



- Nearly 9 of 10 adults have difficulty using everyday health information



Description of Health Literacy

Health Literacy Level	Task Examples	Percentage
Proficient	Using a table, calculate an employee's share of health insurance cost per year.	12%
Intermediate	Read instructions on a prescription label, and determine what time a person can take the medication.	53%
Basic	Read a pamphlet, and give two reasons a person with no symptoms should be tested for a disease.	21%
Below Basic	Read a set of short instructions, and identify what is permissible to drink before a medical test.	14%

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2013. Organizational Change to Improve Health Literacy: Workshop Summary. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18378>.

Association of Health Literacy & Emergency Visits (N=167)

Outcome	Inadequate	Marginal	Adequate
Emergency Room Visit			
Visit	27.9%	16.3%	55.8%
1 or more visits	47.4%	21.1%	31.6%
Hospital Readmission			
No Readmission	29.1%	15.4%	55.6%
1 or more visits	40.0%	22.0%	38.0%



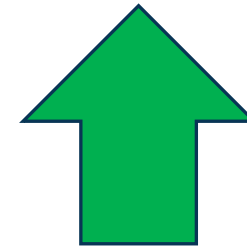
[Impact of low health literacy on patients' health outcomes: a multicenter cohort study | BMC Health Services Research | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#), 2022.

Why Health Literacy is Important



Low health literacy is estimated to cost the U.S. economy up to \$236 billion every year.¹

- Low literacy creates greater health care use



Improving health literacy could prevent 1 million hospital visits.¹

- Could save over \$25 Billion a Year

Why Should We Care About Health Literacy?

Are less able to care for their chronic conditions/diseases

Are more likely to use prescription incorrectly

Use more health care services

Experience frustration when interacting with health care system



Have higher mortality rates

Are less likely to use preventive health services

More likely to use the emergency room

Increasing Expectations In Our Patients

People are living longer

Chronic conditions/diseases

Aging population

Increasing complex health system

More medication

More test and procedures

Growing self care and management

More health forms

Health insurance coverage

Specialized care



Taking It From Two Views (Patient/Health Clinic)

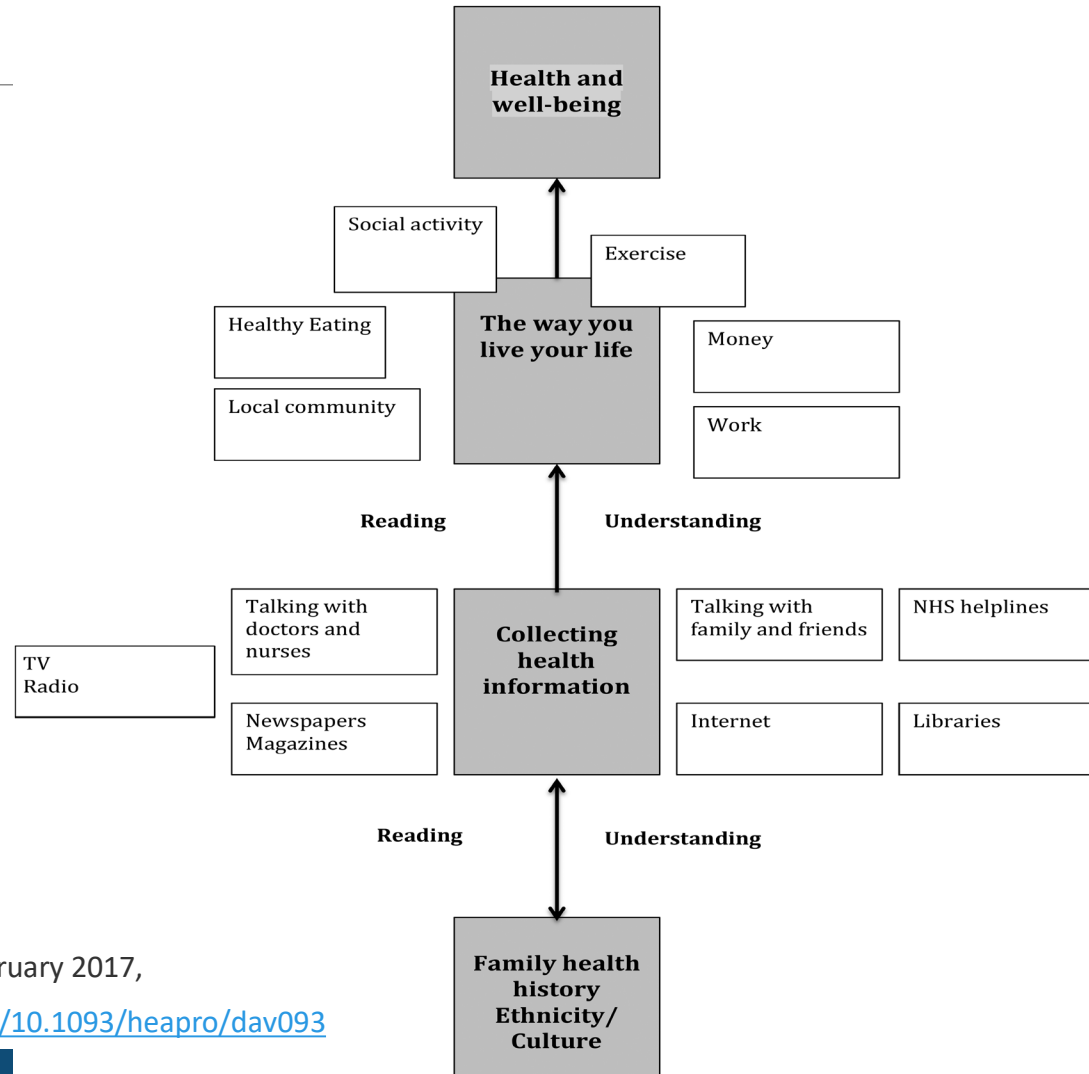
Patient

I want to see my doctor and nurse!
I want to feel better

Health care

Give medication history
Make appointments
Give informed consent
Follow health prescription
Read health education materials
Complete insurance forms
Find your way around in the hospital

Health Literacy & Social Determinants of Health



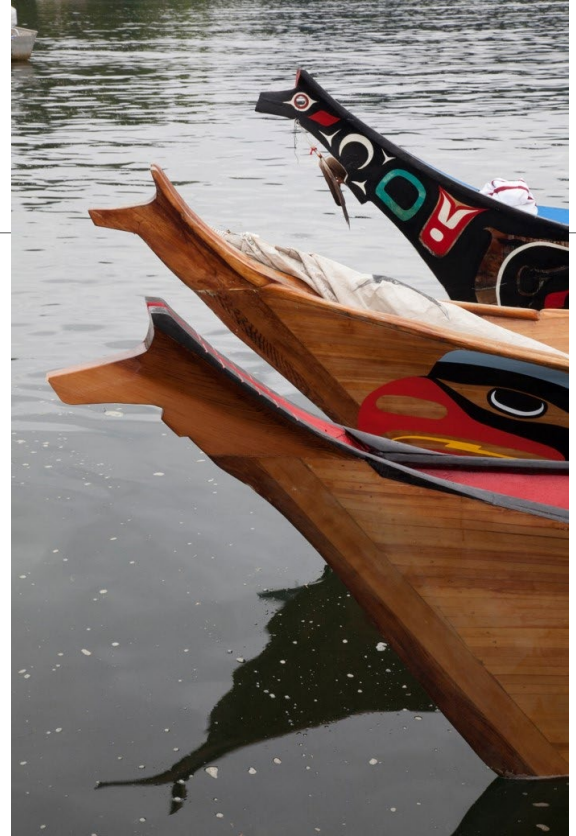
Health Promote Int., 32(1), February 2017,

Pages 130–138, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav093>



Family Health History

- Ethnicity/culture
- Communication
- Reading
- Understanding
- Traditional beliefs and practices
- Primary language



Collecting Health Information

- Nurses, doctors, community health representatives, health educators
- Internet search
- Television, radio
- Family, relatives, friends
- Newspaper, magazine
- Traditional practitioner, medicine man, etc.,
- Library
- Social platform



The Way You Live Your Life

- Local community
- Access to healthcare
- Affordability and access to healthy food
- Access to physical activity
- Social activity
- Work
- Income
- Living environment
- Housing

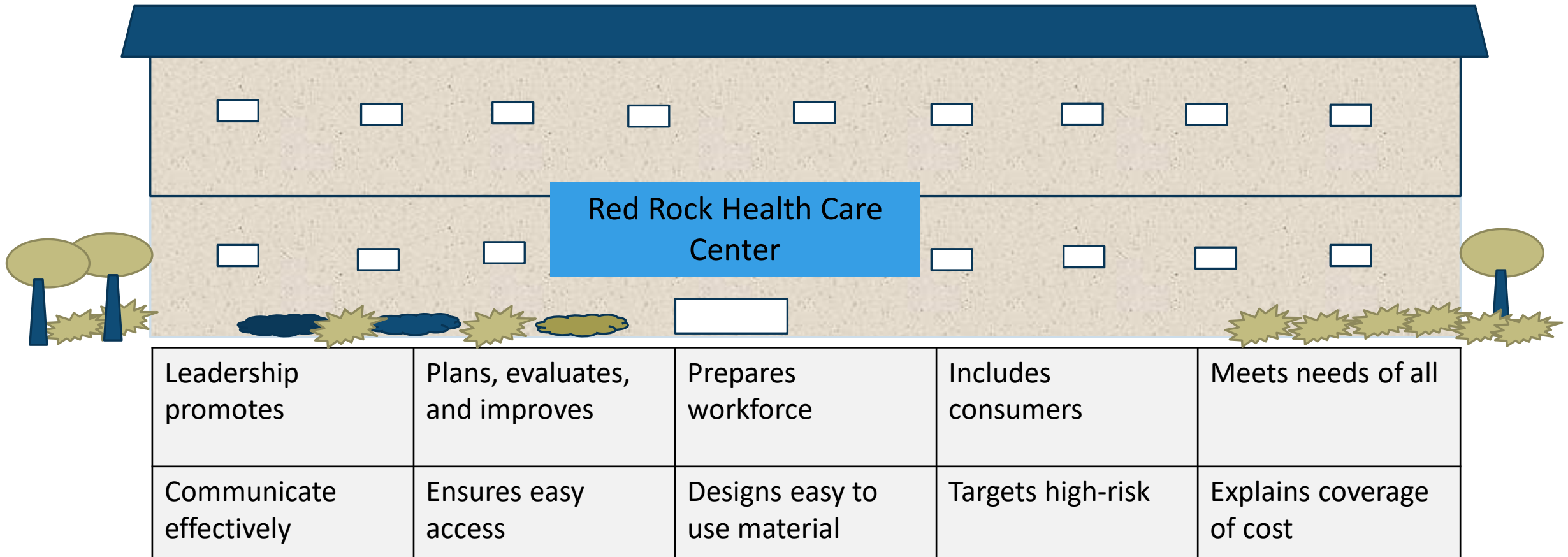


Health & Well-being

- Family health history
- Collecting Health Information
- The Way You Live Your Life



Organizational Health Literacy



National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (201)3. *Organizational Change to Improve Health Literacy: Workshop Summary*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18378>

Healthy People 2030 Objectives on Health Literacy

The proportion of adults whose health care provider checked their understanding

Decrease the proportion of adults who report poor communication with their health care provider

Increase the proportion of adults whose health care providers involved them in decisions as much as they wanted

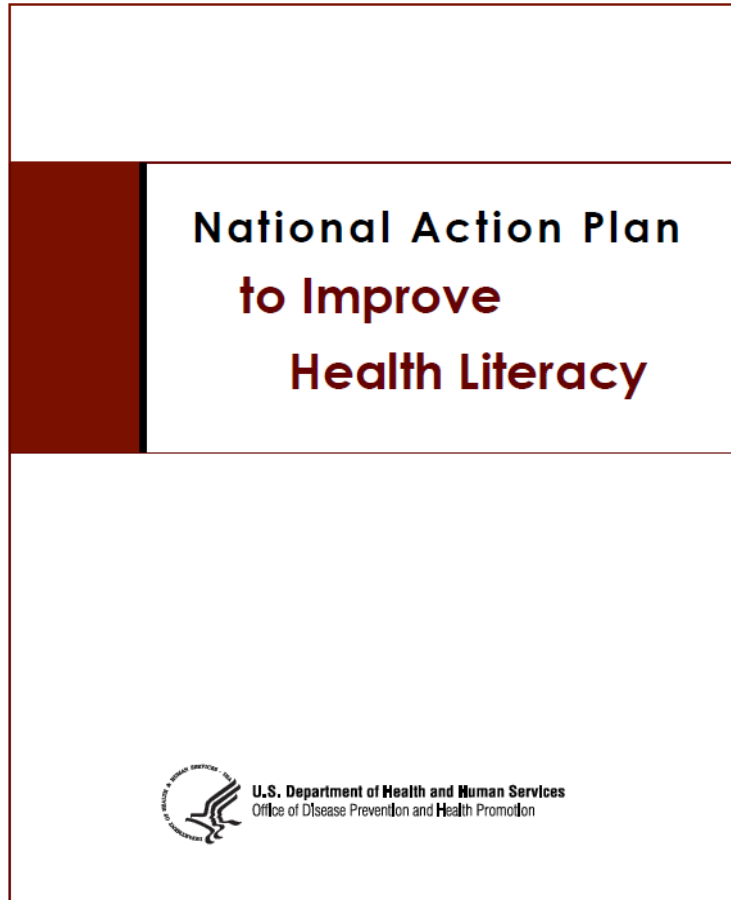
Increase the proportion of people who say their online medical record is easy to understand

Increase the proportion of adults with limited English proficiency who say their providers explain things clearly

Increase the health literacy of the population



National Health Literacy Action Plan



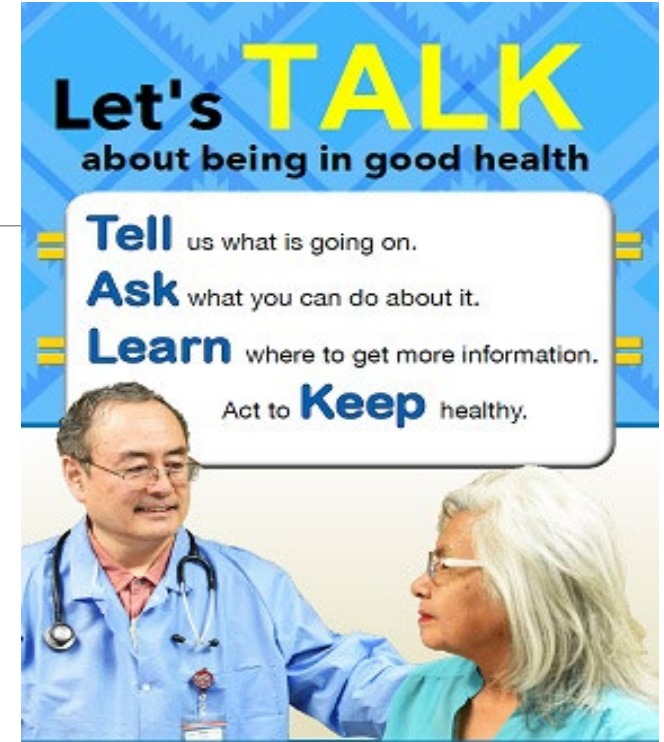
- Blueprint to improve health literacy across organizations
- Identified doable goals and strategies



IHS Health Literacy Workgroup

Reconvened in 2017, consisting of a multidisciplinary team.

- Developed a health literacy work plan that aligns with the National Health Literacy Plan.
 - Monitor progress and reassess each year
- Participate in monthly HHS Health Literacy Workgroup
 - Submit annual report
- Developed a 20-minute basic health literacy and plain language training video.
- Developed a “Let’s TALK” poster.
- Established an Annual Health Literacy Award.
 - Individual and Team Categories



IHS Health Literacy Workgroup (Continue)

- Drafted a White Paper that consists of a “Call to Action” to advance health literacy.
- Promote “documentation of patient comprehension in the Electronic Health Record (EHR).”
- Encourage patients to set behavioral health goals, document, and reassess at the next visit.
- Promote health literacy at meetings, workshops, conferences, and regional meetings.
- Host webinars on best and promising practices.
- Dental Health Literacy Initiative



Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding

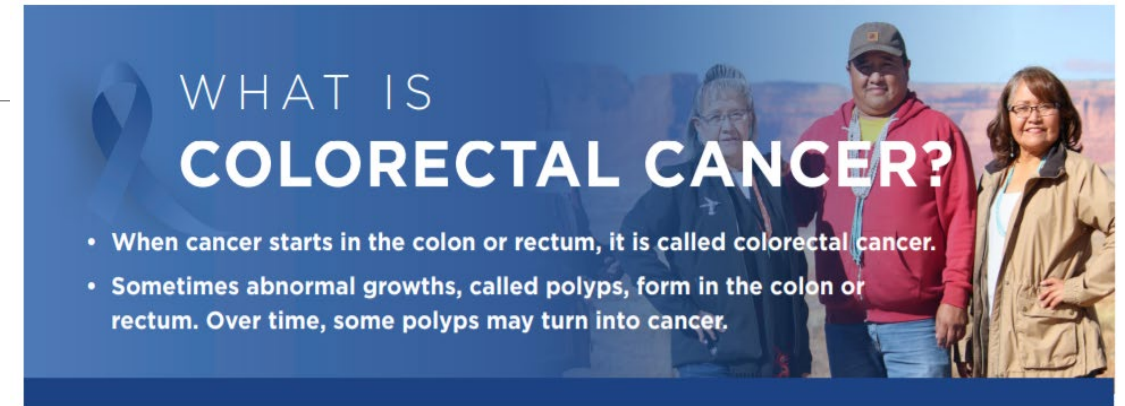
- Use health literacy universal precaution approach
 - Cannot tell if a person can understand
 - May have anxieties
 - The best practice is to use clear everyday language



Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding (continued)

Use Plain Language

- Active voice
- Common Words
- Keep it short
- Positive tone
- Logical Organization
- Easy-to-read features



Who gets Colorectal Cancer?

- Men and women both can get colorectal cancer.
- It is most often found in people who are 45 years and older.

What are the symptoms?

- Sometimes there are no symptoms.
- Blood in your stool (poop).
- Stomach pain, aches, or cramps that do not go away.
- Losing weight and you do not know why.

Can it be found early?

Screening can often find colorectal cancer early, when it is small and has not spread. Regular screening can even prevent colorectal cancer.

What can I do to reduce my risk?

- A diet low in animal fats and high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains may reduce risk of colorectal cancer.
- Get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate physical activity each week or 75 to 150 minutes of high intensity activity (running, jogging) each week.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Do not use (commercial) tobacco.

What tests are available?

Talk to your doctor about which test are right for you.

- Fecal occult blood test (FOBT) to find blood in the stool (poop).
- Fecal immunochemical test (FIT) to find blood in the stool (poop).

Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding (continued)

- Use infographics
- Illustrations
- Positive messaging
- Short and actionable
- Have white space



Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding (continued)

Using everyday words

Annually →	Yearly or every year
Arthritis →	Pain in joints
Cardiovascular →	Having to do with the heart
Dermatologist →	Skin doctor.
Diabetes →	Elevated sugar in the blood.
Hypertension →	High blood pressure.



Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding (continued)

Use teach-back method

Ask patients to repeat or tell you, **in their own words**

If patients cannot restate your instructions correctly, then explain again.

Use pictures, illustrations, or simpler words

Again, use the teach-back method until you confirm understanding.



Take Action to Improve Communication & Understanding (Continued)

Teach-back method

- 83.5% of patients retained information when asked to restate compared to 60.8% of those not engaged in teach-back. *
- Enables patients to rephrase using own language.
- Don't just ask if they understand.
- Instead ask patients to explain what they heard or have them demonstrate back what they heard.

* Bertakis KD. The communication of information from physician to patient: a method for increasing patient retention and satisfaction. *Journal of Family Practice* 5:217-222, 1977.



Health Literacy & Diabetes Management

- Disease Management
 - Understand the physiology
 - Monitor their glucose
 - Take medication
 - Eat healthy
 - Maintaining health weight
 - Getting physical activity
 - Food preparation and selection
 - Avoid commercial tobacco



Future Plan

- Develop a teach-back video
- Develop a “Talking to Your Provider About Your Medication” video
- Propose integration of standard language in the job announcement by using clear written and oral language intended for an appropriate audience.
- Develop additional training videos to post at the Learning Management System.



What You Can Do

[IHS Introduction to Health Literacy](#)

[Annual Health Literacy Award](#)

Use illustrations and pictures

Use [teach back](#) techniques

Document patient comprehension in Electronic Health Record

Pretest printed material with target audience

Read IHS blog on Health Literacy and breast cancer

Establish a Health Literacy workgroup and develop a plan



What You Can Do

- Use universal health literacy precaution
- Use plain language (everyday words)
- Focus on “need to know” and “need to do”
- Have Native speakers for those who do not understand English
- Learn about the local culture



Tools & Resources

[CDC Clear Communication](#)

[NIH Clear Communication](#)

[Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)

[Teach-Back Technique](#)



Questions

