



## Improving Health Outcomes by Increasing Health Literacy

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## Health Literacy: What is It?

### • Basic Functional Definition:

\* The ability to read, understand, and act on health care information (Center for Health Strategies, Inc., 2000).

#### \* Examples:

- \* Read consent forms, medicine labels
- \* Understand written and oral information given by physicians, nurses, pharmacists, insurers
- \* Act to follow instructions about appointment schedules, preparation for medical procedures

### • World Health Organization Extended Definition links health literacy to health promotion:

\* The ability to gain access to, understand, and use health information to promote and maintain good health.

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## Toward a Comprehensive View of Health Literacy

### • Extending the concept of health literacy from compliance to empowerment (Nutbeam, 2001)

#### • Basic health literacy (supported by culturally competent care)

- \* Facilitates access to health care
- \* Promotes adherence to medical regimens

#### • Advanced health literacy (supported by informed choice training)

- \* Facilitates informed choice and involvement in decision making
- \* Allows patients to convey their values regarding treatment options

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## Health Disparities in Late Life



### • Underlying Causes

- \* Poor access to care
- \* High health care costs
- \* Lack of patient adherence
- \* Disparities in health literacy

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## Double Jeopardy for Aged Regarding Health Care



### • Low Health Literacy, plus...

- \* Functional impairment
- \* Sensory impairment
- \* English Proficiency
- \* Lack of assertiveness in health communication

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## Patient Adaptive Tasks Involving Health Literacy



### • Health Promotion

- \* Read and understand food labels
- \* Understand guidelines for physical activity
- \* Understand guidelines for avoiding harmful substances

### • Decision Making

- \* Understand print and TV media messages (e.g., risks of medications advertised)
- \* Have access to and be able to use Web-based information (e.g., judge credibility of sites)

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## Promoting Health Literacy



- Education for basic literacy
- Decision counseling for advanced literacy

### • Sources of intervention

- Lay persons
- Clinicians, MDs, Nurses
- Trained decision counselor (librarian)
- Advantages, disadvantages to each

### • Types of intervention

- Education
- Computer literacy training
- Individual counseling
- Group training

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## Future Trends and Directions



- Elderly of the future are likely to be more educated and have greater health literacy.
- “Cyber-seniors” will show greater demand for health information and shared decision making.
- Consumerist patients will show greater initiative and assertiveness.
- “Digital Divide” and health disparities may persist for poor and minority elders.

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## Ethical Goals in Health Care



- Protect Confidentiality and Privacy
- Acknowledge and Address Conflicts of Interest
- Protect the “Good” of Patients
- Respect Patient Preferences
- Involve Patients in Decision-Making
- Protect Patients from Abuse and Neglect

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## Cultures of Care



- **Explanatory Models** that Govern Ethical Analysis for Decision-Making in Health Care
- **Attitudes and Norms** Established in Caring Professions
  - \* Transmitted through Education and Mentoring
  - \* Influenced by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender of Practitioner
- **Patient Cultures and Practitioner Cultures** Differ
  - \* Strong and Permanent Practitioner Identities
  - \* Transitional and Involuntary Patient Identities
- **The Influence of Ageist Bias**



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