Health Literacy

A Discussion with the Partnership for Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Planning Consortium of Volusia and Flagler Counties

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Overview

- **Health Literacy 101**
- Perspective
- Health Literacy & HIV/AIDS Care
- Getting Started
- Questions/Discussion
Health Literacy 101

What is Health Literacy?

**health literacy**

*noun / ˈhelθ ˈli-t(ə)rə-sē*

: capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions

Scope of the Problem

- 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy
  - 19,000 adults
  - First nationwide assessment of health literacy
- 88% of those surveyed were NOT proficient!
Health Literacy 101

Scope of the Problem

- 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy
  - 19,000 adults
- Estimated 90 million people are NOT proficient in health literacy.
- Includes a disproportionate number of individuals from vulnerable populations:
  - Low socio-economic status
  - Racial and ethnic minorities
  - Elderly
Health Literacy 101

How important is HL?

Health literacy is a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income, employment status, education level, or race.
Health Literacy 101

How important is HL?

- Compared to those with proficient HL, adults with low HL have:
  - 4 times higher healthcare costs
  - Increased risk of hospitalization
  - Longer hospital stays (average: 2 days) and higher readmissions
  - Increased mortality

- Estimated direct cost of impact on U.S. economy:

  **3.6 TRILLION**
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Perspective

Don’t take my word for it...

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgTuD7l7LG8
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Impact on Outcomes

- Low HL is strongly associated with poor chronic disease management.
- Lower HL patients are less likely to take and adhere to treatment.
- Higher HL increases probability of treatment retention and is associated with better health outcomes
  - CD4 count
  - Viral Suppression
Health literacy and patient knowledge in a Southern US HIV clinic

- Interviews with 157 patients at a community-care clinic
  - 48% of patients were reading below a 9th grade level.
  - One-third of patients could not name their HIV medications (significantly related to low literacy).
  - Two-thirds of those reading below the 9th grade level did not know how to take their medications correctly.
  - 75% did not know the meaning of a CD4 count or viral load.
  - Patients with low literacy skills were more likely to state that their physician was their sole source of HIV information.

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Addressing Health Literacy

health literacy

noun / ˈhelθ ˈli-t(ə)rə-sē
: capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions
Getting Started

To improve HL, increase capacity!

Media

Individual Capacity
- Literacy/Numeracy
- Prior Knowledge

Health Care System

Socio-economic status

Education

Age/Gender

Race/Ethnicity
Getting Started

We have to start somewhere

- HL is a population-level public health issue that requires a system-wide response

- DHHS National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy
  - Provides everyone with access to accurate and actionable health information
  - Delivers person-centered health information and services
  - Supports lifelong learning and skills to promote good health
Getting Started

Pop Quiz
Universal Precautions

- Print materials
  - 1 in 5 adults read at 5th grade level or below
  - Average American is 8th-9th grade level
  - Most health care materials written at 10th grade or higher

- Research indicates that ALL patients prefer medical information that is easy to read and understand
  - However, for those with low HL, this is ESSENTIAL
Patient-Centered Care

- Organizational Assessments
  - Toolkits are available for evaluating organizational approach to patient care and HL
  - Offer guidance on implementing change
  - Currently hospital focused, but clinic and primary care tools are being developed

- Patient Assessments
  - Several tools available for determining health literacy levels in individuals
  - Work-in-progress
Take-Home Messages

- Health Literacy is OUR problem
- Fundamental to patient-centered care
- We can’t afford to ignore any longer
Thank you!

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