What Was That You Said?

Strategies for Communicating More Clearly in Diabetes Education

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Which Public Health Issue:

- Impacts nearly one in every three people living in the united states?
- Can hit any population segment regardless of age, race, education or income?
- Costs the healthcare system as much as 58 billion a year?
- Can't be diagnosed with any new medical technology and is not visible to the eye?
- Answer: Health Literacy

Defining health literacy & health numeracy:

- The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

-Healthy People 2020

- The degree to which individuals have the capacity to access, process, interpret and act on numerical, quantitative, graphical, and probabilistic health information needed to make effective health decisions

Managing Diabetes: health literacy tasks

- What are the self-management tasks required of a person with diabetes?

Managing Diabetes: tasks requiring adequate health literacy:

- Pill bottles
- syringes
- Appointment slips
- Treatment instructions
- Meter instructions
  - Meter results
  - Coding
- Health education materials
- Informed consents
- Insurance applications
- Food labels
- Insulin to carb ratios

Take 3 x a day

With Meals?
Every 8 hours?
Any old time of day?

AADE 7:

Healthy Eating
Being Active
Monitoring
Taking Medication
Problem Solving
Healthy Coping
Reducing Risks

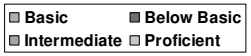
- All Aspects of DSME are affected by limited literacy!

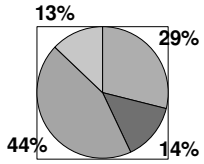
What is the strongest predictor of an individual's health status?

A. Age
B. Income
C. Literacy Skills
D. Employment status
E. Educational level
F. Racial or ethnic group

G. -Partnership for Cleat Health Communication, 2003

How many people are affected by limited literacy? Results from the NAAL 2003





- **Proficient:** define medical term from complex document, calculate share of employee's health insurance costs 13%
- **Intermediate**: Determine healthy weight from BMI chart, interpret prescription and over the counter drug labels 44%
- **Basic:** understand simple patient education handout 29%
- **Below Basic**: circle date on appointment slip, understand simple pamphlet about pre-test instructions 14%

Inadequate Health Literacy is Associated with Poor Health:

- Persons with limited health literacy are more likely to:
  - Skip preventative measures
  - Enter the healthcare system when they are sicker
  - Have less knowledge of their illness and its management
  - Have more frequent visits to the Emergency Department and hospital admissions for preventable reasons
  - Report a sense of shame about their skill level

Implications of limited literacy: medication errors

42% could not comprehend directions for taking medication on an empty stomach.

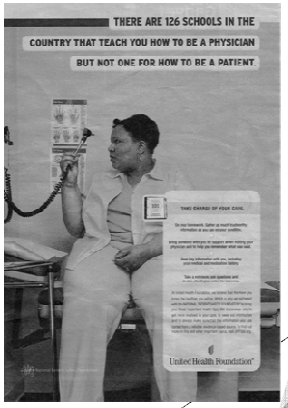
Inadequate Functional Health Literacy Among Patients at Two Public Hospitals

Who is affected most by limited health literacy?

- Elderly
- Limited proficiency in English language
- Limited education

But Don't forget:

- We all feel health-illiterate when we receive a new diagnosis.
- Our health is personal and emotional
- The healthcare system is complex
- 30,000 new words
- acronyms



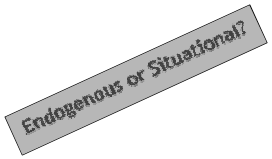
What can we do?

- Improving verbal communication skills
  - Cultural & linguistic competency
- Improve written communication
- Improve health systems:
  - Forms and processes
  - Improve the physical environment

Improving Communication Skills: a universal cautions approach

- Can't tell by looking
- Communicate clearly with everyone
- Confirm understanding with everyone
- If it works for people with limited literacy, it will work for everyone

Improving Verbal Communication: Plain Language



Avoid:

- Medical words and acronyms:
  - Vertigo
- Concept words
  - Gauge
- Category words
  - poultry
- Value judgment words
  - Adequate
  - Increase gradually

What is a plain language alternative?

- Hypoglycemia
- Adverse reaction
- PRN
- Topical
- Monitor

Improving Verbal Communication: Slow Down

- Use orienting statements
- Sit rather than stand
- Listen rather than speak
  - Watch non verbals
  - Use person's terms

Improving Verbal Communication: Limit Information

- Focus on key messages and repeat (1-3 main points)
- Most people want to know:
  - Why is this important?
  - What do I need to do?

How do we do this with DSME?

Limit and Focus Information on specific actions

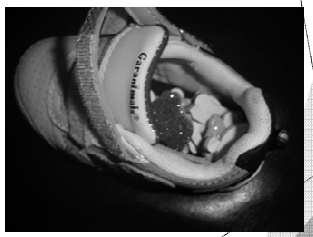
- Focus on what the person needs to *do* rather than general concepts

Checking your blood sugar is important.

Vs.

Check your blood sugar when you wake up in the morning, before you have eaten. Write down the result so you can share with your diabetes educator.

Limit and Focus information on specific actions:



Please pick up the letters and put them in the bag.

Effectively solicit questions

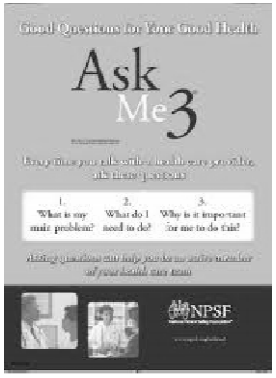
"What do you want for breakfast?"

Effectively Solicit Questions:

Remember the role of shame/fear in question-asking:

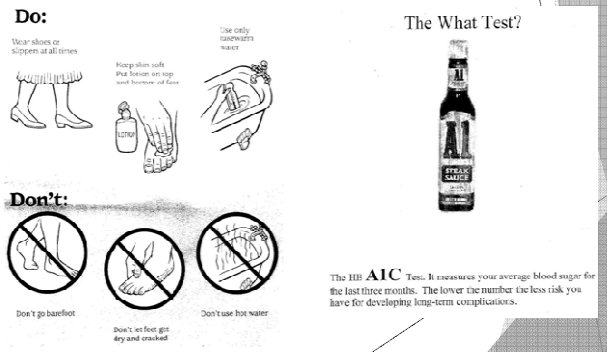
- "A lot of people with diabetes have asked questions about…"
- "I know this is a lot of new information. I want to make sure I did a good job of explaining everything to you…"
- "What questions do you have?"
- "What things are confusing about…"

Ask Me 3

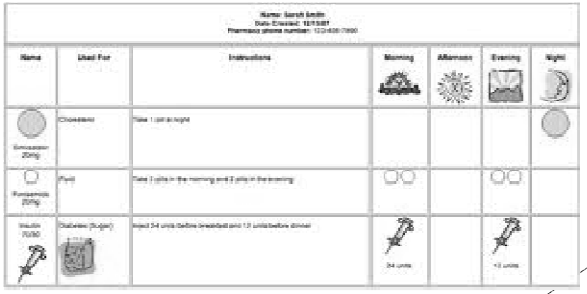


National Patient Safety Foundation & Partnership for Clear Communication

Strategies for Improving Communication: show or draw pictures



Use pictures to make instructions less confusing:



Improving Verbal Communication: The Teach-Back Technique

A patient kept appearing in our ER on a routine basis in a diabetic coma. She claimed she was injecting her insulin every day, just like the nurse showed her. Finally, one physician asked her to demonstrate how she took her insulin. She asked for an orange so she could inject it before eating it, just as the nurse had demonstrated.

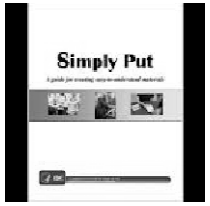
The Teach-Back Technique:

- Now that we have talk about how to put the test strip in the meter, show me the steps of how you would teach this to your friend.

Improving Written Communication

- Clear and uncluttered
- Use of plain language
- 1-2 sllable words
- Short sentences
- Use active voice
- Highlight action steps
- Color photos more appealing
- Headings or subheadings to break up text
- White space helps readers scan text quickly

Resource for creating and evaluating Easy to Understand Materials



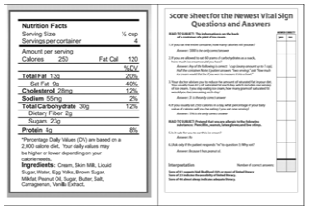
http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11938

Health Literacy Resources:

- Health Literacy Toolkit. University of North Carolina (2011)
  - http://nchealthliteracy.org/toolkit/
- AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit
  - http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/literacy/
- American Medical Association Foundation
  www.amafoundation.org
- Partnership for Clear Health Communication
  www.AskMe3.org

Tools for Testing Readability:

- SMOG Readability Index
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level/ Reading Ease Score
- Fry Readability Scale
- Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM)
- Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults
- The Newest Vital Sign



Call To Action

- What is one thing YOU can do to improve communication with your patients/participants in diabetes education?

Thank you!

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Strategies Continued: Create a Shame-Free Environment

"Even patients with well-developed literacy skills may say they understand to avoid seeming 'stupid' or annoying to the clinician." -AMA

- Adopt an attitude of helpfulness
- Encourage questions
- Involve family members
- Look for ways to make systems more patient friendly

"No knowledge is more crucial than knowledge about health. Without it, no other life goal can be successfully achieved"

-Carnegie Foundation