Strategies to Improve Communication Between Pharmacy Staff & Patients

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What About You???
Overview

1. Define health literacy
2. Describe the health care experiences of low-literacy patients
3. Discuss health literacy and medication use
4. Review techniques to improve communication with low-literacy patients
5. Discuss the economic impact of low health literacy
Definition

Health Literacy:
“The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010*
Skills Needed for Health Literacy

- Evaluating information for credibility and quality
- Analyzing relative risks and benefits
- Calculating dosages
- Interpreting Test results
- Locating health information
Health Literacy in America: Results from the NAAL

Proficient: Define medical term from complex document, Calculate share of employee’s health insurance costs

Intermediate: Determine healthy weight from BMI chart, Interpret prescription and over-the-counter drug labels

Basic: Understand simple patient education handout

Below Basic: Circle date on appointment slip, Understand simple pamphlet about pre-test instructions

Kutner et al 2006
High Risk Groups

- Elderly
- Minorities
- Immigrants
- Poor

- Homeless
- Prisoners
- Persons with limited education

Kirsch et al 1993
## Functional Literacy of High Risk Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Low Literacy (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly (≥ 65)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/Ethnic group: White</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level: 0-8 yrs</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 yrs</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS/GED</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants: 0-8 yrs prior educ</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9+ yrs prior educ</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weiss 2005. Adapted from Table 2-1.
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Health Care Experiences

• Low-literate patients commonly hide their difficulty
• Many feel ashamed
• Avoidant behaviors

• When do you suspect low literacy?
• Your experiences?

Possible Indicators of Low Health Literacy

- Excuses: “I forgot my glasses.”
- Lots of papers folded up in purse/pocket
- Lack of follow-through with tests/appts.
- Seldom ask questions
- Questions are basic in nature
- Difficulty explaining medical concerns or how to take meds

Universal Precautions

- Can’t tell by looking
- Communicate clearly with everyone
- Confirm understanding with everyone
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Low Literacy and Medication Use

- Ability to identify their own medications: 12-18 x greater odds
- Understanding of how to take medications:
  - Take med every 6 hrs: 52% correct
  - Take med on empty stomach: 46% correct
- Understanding of drug mechanisms and side effects:
  - Warfarin works by thinning blood: 70% correct
  - Bleeding/bruising most common SE: 49% correct
- Misinterpretation of common warning labels: 3-4 x more likely to misinterpret

## Misinterpretation of Warning Labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Take with food" /></td>
<td>Don't take food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Do not chew or crush, swallow whole" /></td>
<td>Chew pill and crush before swallowing. Chew it up so it will dissolve. Don’t swallow whole or you might choke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="You should avoid prolonged or excessive exposure to direct and/or artificial sunlight while taking this medication" /></td>
<td>Don't leave medicine in the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Don't drink and drive" /></td>
<td>Don't drink and drive. Don’t drink alcohol. It’s poison, and it’ll kill you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Do not take dairy products, antacids, or iron preparations within one hour of this medication" /></td>
<td>If allergic to dairy, don't take medicine. Don’t eat for 1 hour after taking medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Medication should be taken with plenty of water" /></td>
<td>Don’t take when wet. Don’t need water. Don’t drink hot water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="For external use only" /></td>
<td>Use extreme caution in how you take it. Medicine will make you feel dizzy. Take only if you need it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Davis et al. 2006. Adapted from Table 3.
Stats to Show Understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple, familiar-- 1\textsuperscript{st} grade level</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More complex-- 10\textsuperscript{th}- 12\textsuperscript{th} grade level</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar, multi-step-- 10\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} grade level</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Davis et al 2006. Adapted from Table 3.
Health Literacy and Medication Use

- Understanding of numerical information
  If your blood test result for warfarin is just right when it is between 2.0 and 3.0, which of the following results would be “just right”?  
  29% correct

- Medication adherence

- Adverse drug events (?)

- Health care costs

Some Challenges in Trying to Improve Things

• Increasingly complex health system
  ▫ Greater self-care requirements
  ▫ More medications for chronic conditions
  ▫ Formulary and manufacturer changes
  ▫ Medication reconciliation

• Most patient instructions are written
  ▫ Low-literacy pts have trouble understanding

• Verbal instructions
  ▫ Often complex
  ▫ Delivered rapidly
  ▫ Easy to forget in stressful situation
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Recommended Strategies to Improve Communication

1. Explain things clearly in plain language
2. Focus on key messages and repeat
3. Use a “teach back” or “show me” technique to check understanding
4. Effectively solicit questions
5. Use patient-friendly educational materials to enhance interaction

1. Explain It Clearly in Plain Language

- Slow down the pace of your speech
- Use plain, non-medical language
  - “Blood pressure pill” instead of “antihypertensive”
  - Pay attention to patient’s own terms and use them back
- Avoid vague terms
  - “Take 1 hour before you eat breakfast” instead of “Take on an empty stomach”
Using Plain Language:
What could we say instead of...

- Adverse reaction
- Hypoglycemia
- PRN
- Topical
- Suppository

Side effect
Low sugar
When you need it
On skin
Pill that goes in your bottom/behind
2. Focus on Key Messages and Repeat

- Limit information
  - Focus on 1-3 key points
- Develop short explanations for common medical conditions and side effects
- Discuss specific behaviors rather than general concepts
  - What the patient needs to do
- Review each point at the end
3. Check Understanding Using Teach-Back

New Concept: Health Information, Advice, or Change in Management

Clinician Explains New Concept

Patient Recalls and Comprehends

Adherence

Clinician Assesses Patient Recall and Comprehension

Clinician Clarifies and Tailors Explanation

Clinician Reassesses Patient Recall and Comprehension

Schillinger et al 2003
Teach Back Scripts

- I want to make sure I explained everything clearly. If you were trying to explain to your husband how to take this medicine, what would you say?
- Let’s review the main side effects of this new medicine. What are the 2 things that I asked you to watch out for?
- Show me how you would use this inhaler.
4. Effectively Solicit Questions

• Don’t say:
  ▫ Do you have any questions?
  ▫ Any questions?

• Instead say:

  *What questions do you have?*
At home
What did the doctor say?

I don’t know!
5. Patient-Friendly Materials

- Appropriate Content
- Plain Language
- (K.I.S.S.)
- Layout
- Illustrations
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Low Health Literacy = Use of More Health Care Services

- People with low health literacy had 6% more hospital visits
- Fewer doctor visits, more hospital resources
Economic Impact of Low Health Literacy

- $73 billion extra in 1998 dollars
- Medicare pays 39%
- FICA pays additional expenditure
THE JOINT COMMISSION REPORTS...

- 65% of Sentinel Events
- 90% of Root Cause Analyses

- Patient Safety Goal effective January 1, 2006
  ▫ “facilities must implement a standardized approach to hand-off communications, including an opportunity to ask and respond to questions”
Reasons for Communication Break Down

- Different communication styles
- High level of activity
- Frequent interruptions
- No standardization in organizing essential information
- Loss of information
S-BAR MODEL

- S- Situation
- B- Background
- A- Assessment
- R- Recommendation
SBAR Example...

(Listen carefully to this example)
“PQRSTU” MODEL OF SYMPTOM ANALYSIS

- P- Precipitating, Palliating, Previous Tx of Therapy
- Q- Quality
- R- Radiation
- S- Severity
- T- Temporal
- U- YOU!
Help me make sure I’ve explained things clearly...

- How do you know if a patient has low health literacy?
Help me make sure I’ve explained things clearly so far...

- Name at least 2 techniques to improve communication with low-literacy patients.
Help me make sure I’ve explained things clearly so far...

- Provide an example of the teach-back.
Wrap Up

• Adopt Universal Precautions

• Implement Strategies to Improve Communication, e.g.,
  ▫ Plain Language
  ▫ Focus on Key Messages
  ▫ Teach Back
Health Literacy Organizations and Programs

• Health Literacy. American Medical Society Foundation.  
  http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8115.html

• Health Literacy Center, University of New England  
  http://www.une.edu/hlit/

• Health Literacy Consulting  
  http://www.healthliteracy.com/

• National Institute for Literacy  
  http://www.nifl.gov/

• World Education, Health and Literacy Initiative  
  http://www.worlded.org/
What questions do you have?