

Health Literacy : Enhancing Patient Communication



Limited health literacy can lead to poor health outcomes. The following tips can help you and your staff communicate more effectively with your patients.

1. RECOGNIZE POSSIBLE SIGNS OF LOW LITERACY

Patients with low literacy may:

- Have difficulty filling out forms, giving correct health information, or scheduling appointments.
- Ask fewer questions, miss referrals or medical tests, and have trouble following medication or treatment instructions.



2. UTILIZE A TEAM APPROACH

All staff should:

- Recognize patients who may need help understanding health information.
- Share concerns with staff while protecting privacy.
- Help patients with forms and other instructions when needed.



3. USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

- Speak slowly and use simple words.
- Avoid medical terms patients may not understand.
- Ask about preferred language and provide interpreters if needed.
- Give information in small steps with only a few key points at a time.



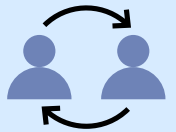
4. USE VISUAL AIDS

- Use pictures, videos, and drawings to help patients understand.
- Written materials should support spoken instructions.
- Keep written information simple and easy to read (about a fifth-grade level).



5. USE THE TEACH-BACK METHOD

- Show patients how to do a task, then ask them to show or explain it back.
- Use this to check if instructions were clear, not to test the patient. Example: "Can you tell me how you will take this medicine?"
- Along with explaining a task, model the task you ask patients to complete.



6. PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE & CARING ENVIRONMENT

- Connect patients with community resources.
- Hire bilingual staff and train staff in clear communication.
- Keep forms simple and offer help filling them out if needed.



7. EMPOWER YOUR PATIENTS

- Ask open-ended questions to encourage patients to talk.
- Help patients set health goals and create a simple action plan.
- Include family members if the patient agrees.



For more information about health literacy and CDC trainings for providers, visit: cdc.gov/health-literacy or scan the QR code.



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