Developing and Promoting Health Literacy Partnerships:
Working with health care to enhance patient safety

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What is the strongest predictor of individual health status?

A) age
B) income
C) education level
D) employment status
E) racial or ethnic group
F) literacy skills
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In this presentation, you will learn:

• Why health literacy is vital to health outcomes
• Goals of the English for Health program
• How we have developed partnerships for health
• Outcomes of the program
Literacy Levels and Health Outcomes

• Low literacy is associated with poverty and lack of access to health care

• "Non-compliant" patients who do not follow discharge instructions often lack the literacy skills to do so
What is Health Literacy?

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

- The Institute of Medicine 2004
What is Health Literacy?

• Limited health literacy is a health hazard

• Health care providers in Wisconsin lose $3.4 billion annually due to health literacy problems

2003 Health Literacy Assessment
(National Assessment of Adult Literacy)

Entire population

- Proficient     12%
- Intermediate   53%
- Basic          22%
- Below basic    14%
Literacy Levels and Health Outcomes

- About **36% of all Americans** have basic or below basic health literacy skills.

- They cannot use a graph to determine a healthy weight range.

- They cannot sufficiently read prescription labels.
2003 Health Literacy Assessment

Basic and Below Basic Health Literacy

– White 28%
– Native Americans 48%
– Blacks 58%
– Hispanics 66%
Latinos in Wisconsin
(Wisconsin Family Health Survey, 2001-2005)

• Higher rate of death from diabetes

• 65% overweight or obese

• Less likely to have health insurance
(77% of Latinos, compared with 93% of the total)

• Less likely to have cholesterol screening
Advancing Health Literacy

• Literacy Network’s *English for Health* class is intended for high beginning to low intermediate ESL students in Dane County.
Program Goals

• Teach students basic English skills to connect with the health care system
• Help students find and access affordable health care
• Encourage students to ask questions about their health and health care
About our Learners

- Most have had little interaction with health care system
- Income and level of education vary greatly
- Most do not use health care
Beginnings of *English for Health*

- Developed an initial nine-week, 36-hour course, now expanded to 12 weeks.
- Program includes: finding a doctor, basic medical vocabulary, medications, and communication with healthcare professionals.
Partnership Steps: 2009

• Latino Health Council endorsed program

• St Mary’s Hospital hosts class, provides financial and in-kind support

• UW School of Pharmacy students developed projects, curriculum
2010 Recognition

Wisconsin Literacy: Outstanding Health Literacy Achievement.
2010 Recognition

• Wisconsin Department of Health Services: *Promising Practice* for improving minority health outcomes (one of five statewide).

Partnership Steps: 2011

- **Humana** grant funds program expansion in 2011

- **Group Health Cooperative, Wingra Community Health Center** and **Dean Health** support program, host classes this fall

- **UW School of Medicine** students serve as classroom tutors
Partnership Steps: 2011

• **United Way** Safe and Healthy Aging: improving toolkit with usability testing

• **UW School of Medicine:** ESL students are paid consultants

• Contract work with local HMO to improve the readability of documents
Partners are Essential

• Panels about accessing health care from area providers build more personal connections

• Nutritionist from Willy Street Grocery Co-op help students plan healthy low-cost meals, and support the program with a grant
What makes a Healthy Partnership?

• It starts at the top: leadership support
• Acknowledgment that they benefit
• Good advanced planning
• Emphasis on common goals
• Joint leadership on issues
Program Objectives

• Learners will demonstrate improved verbal and written skills to facilitate better advocacy and proficiency in navigating the complex health care systems

• Learners will participate in classroom discussions and mock health clinic and successfully complete at least 70% of targeted project outcomes
Program Components

• Guest speakers discuss how to request an interpreter and how to access quality healthcare

• Students practice skills in a real clinic

• Students correspond with the teacher in journals, discussing health habits, concerns and questions
Program Framework

Learners are in situations where they must use language in problem solving, communication, and self-advocacy.
Program Framework

Learners practice new language skills in authentic situations with members of the healthcare community.
Program Framework

Learners engage in hands-on activities: creating posters about nutrition, using English to talk about their personal health.
Mock Clinic

Learners communicate with clinic staff, make appointments, fill out basic forms, describe health symptoms and discuss medications with pharmacist.
Mock Clinic

- Learners practice in an authentic setting with local healthcare professionals
- Discuss asking for help before, during and after appointments
Connections with healthcare systems

• Students ask questions of local healthcare professionals:
  – How blood pressure affects overall health
  – Work with a nurse to test their own blood pressure and discuss its effect on their individual health
  – Learner-centered instruction addresses varying learning styles and preferences by incorporating multiple intelligences in lesson activities
Anecdotal Outcomes

- **Myriam** cut her cholesterol in half by eating better
- **Manuela** made her own doctor’s appointment and asked a pharmacist questions about a cold medicine
- **Juan Carlos** found out how to access low-cost health insurance at Community health center after being laid-off and losing his job
Outcomes

• 85% of students increased health-related knowledge

• All students demonstrated increased knowledge and comfort after attending mock clinic

• 85% of students self-reported increases in practice of health habits

• Students learned about health care systems and health care options for the uninsured
Next steps

• Regional health literacy task force conference builds awareness across health care systems

• Support the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy:
  • Provides access to accurate and actionable health information
  • Delivers person-centered health information and services
  • Supports lifelong learning and skills to promote good health
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