

# *Do your clients understand you? Health Literacy in Our Communities*

**BC Association of Community Response Networks  
Provincial Learning Event  
February 21, 2017  
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# Learning Objectives

- **Be able to define health literacy**
- **Identify health literacy factors that may impact working with community members**
- **Be able to list assessment tools**
- **Be able to list intervention strategies**

# Health Literacy Defined (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2014)

“the ability to **access, comprehend, evaluate and communicate** information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life course”

# Other Definitions

**Literacy:** the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts (UNESCO)

**Low literacy:** ability of adults to read, write and comprehend information between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels of difficulty (Bastable et al, 2011)

**Functional illiteracy:** reading and writing skills that are inadequate to manage daily living and employment tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level (Schlechty, 2001)

# Health Literacy in Canada



60% Adults

88% Seniors

**Are NOT health literate**

# Health Literacy- So what?

People with poor reading and comprehension skills have:

- Disproportionately higher medical costs
- Medication errors
- Increased number of hospitalizations & readmissions
- Unnecessary trips to emergency
- Longer hospital stays
- Inadequate knowledge & care of chronic health condition
- More perceived physical and psychosocial problems than do literate persons

(Baker et al, 1998; Baker et al, 1999; DeWalt et al, 2004; Sudore et al, 2006; Weiss, 2003; Weiss et al, 2005)

# Health Literacy- So what?

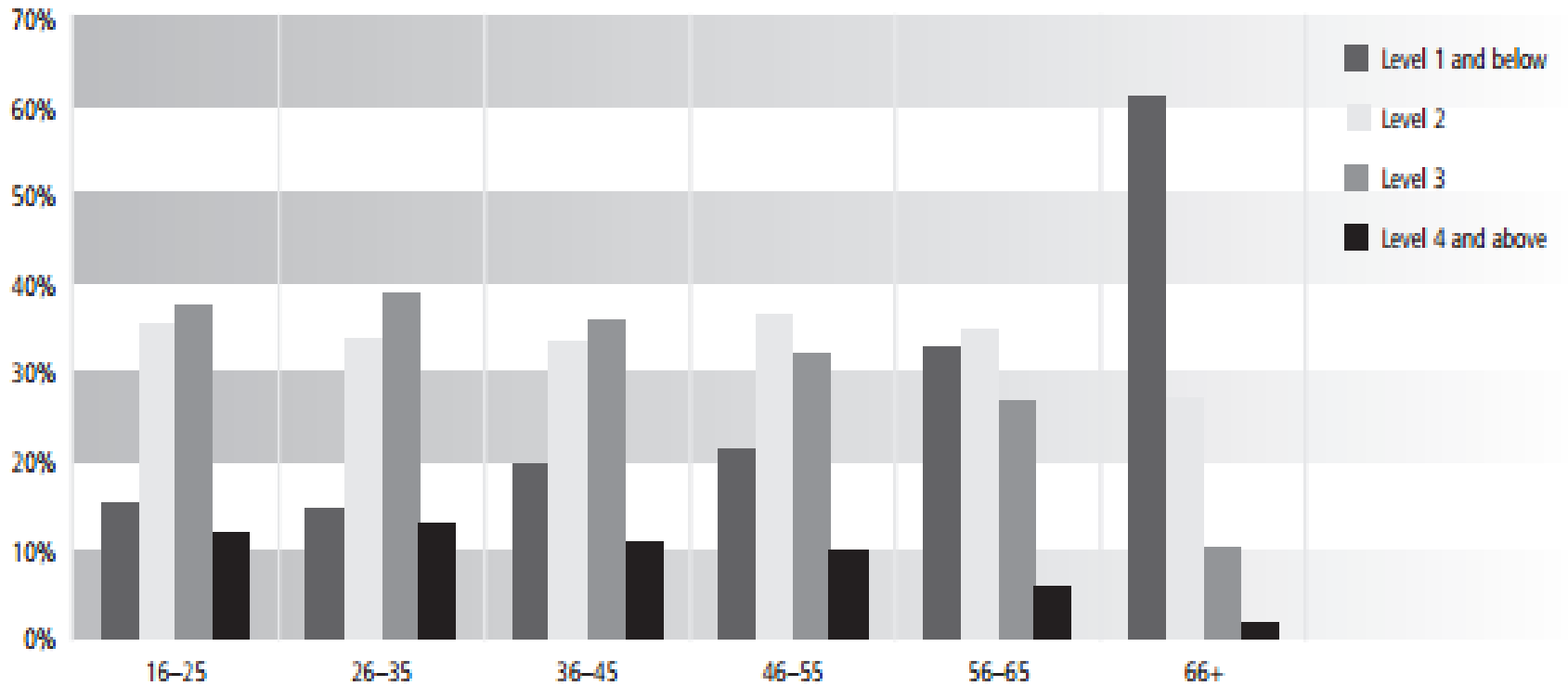
What does this mean in the context of health promotion and self management?

- Unable to benefit from information they are given
- Cannot be expected to maintain health or manage independently

→ Negative impact on QoL and cost of health care

(Bastable et al, 2011)

# Health Literacy Skill Levels- Canada (Canadian Public Health Association, 2008)



Source: Canadian Council on Learning, 2007b.



# Health Literacy Skill Levels- Canada

**1 in 8 adults over 65 appear to have  
adequate health literacy skills**

(Canadian Public Health Association, 2008)

# Health Literacy Fact

- **40-80% of medical information given is forgotten immediately**
- **Half that is retained is incorrect**

(Kessels, 2003)

# Populations at Risk

(Canadian Public Health Association, 2008)

- People over age 65
- Recent immigrants
- Low income
- Low capacity in English or French
- Not in the workforce
- Less formal education
- Persons with disabilities

# People with Disabilities

(Canadian Public Health Association, 2008)

- **1/10 Canadians has a learning disability**
- **People with disabilities make up a disproportionate # of Canadian adults with lowest levels of literacy**
- **1/5 Aboriginal people (15+) has a disability**
- **~50% of Canadian adults w/ disabilities experience literacy barriers**
- **20% have less than Grade 9 education**

# Health Literacy (Institute of Medicine Committee of Health Literacy, 2012)

[A prescription to end the confusion](#)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBy3I7YKCQQ&list=PLGTMA6Qkejfi4v0i5ID2f\\_IBWdUBWLzFS&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBy3I7YKCQQ&list=PLGTMA6Qkejfi4v0i5ID2f_IBWdUBWLzFS&index=2)

# Assessment

## Why screen for low literacy?

- ✓ Help you identify which clients may require more attention to communication

## How?

- Short Assessment of Health Literacy (SAHL)
- Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine- Short Form (REAL-SF)
- The Newest Vital Sign

# The Newest Vital Sign (2005)

- Screening tool that identifies patients at risk for low health literacy
- Administered in 3 minutes (nutritional label provided w/ 6 questions; 4+ correct= adequate health literacy)
- Evidence: Valid and reliable in detecting limited health literacy
- Free and easily accessible  
(<http://www.pfizer.com/health/literacy>)

# The Newest Vital Sign (2005)

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size	½ cup
Servings per container	4
Amount per serving	
Calories 250	Fat Cal 120
	%DV
<b>Total Fat</b> 13g	20%
Sat Fat 9g	40%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 28mg	12%
<b>Sodium</b> 55mg	2%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 30g	12%
Dietary Fiber 2g	
Sugars 23g	
<b>Protein</b> 4g	8%

\*Percentage Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

**Ingredients:** Cream, Skim Milk, Liquid Sugar, Water, Egg Yolks, Brown Sugar, Milkfat, Peanut Oil, Sugar, Butter, Salt, Carrageenan, Vanilla Extract.



# Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine- SF

7-item word recognition test to provide clinicians with a valid quick assessment of patient health literacy

Evidence: Validated and field tested (Arozullah et al, 2007)

Behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
Exercise \_\_\_\_\_  
Menopause \_\_\_\_\_  
Rectal \_\_\_\_\_  
Antibiotics \_\_\_\_\_  
Anemia \_\_\_\_\_  
Jaundice \_\_\_\_\_  
  
**TOTAL SCORE** \_\_\_\_\_

# Short Assessment of Health Literacy (2010)

- Estimates reading and comprehension of common medical terms
- 18 test terms with a related meaning and distractor word
- Administered in 2-3 minutes
- Evidence: Valid and reliable (Lee et al, 2010)

# Short Assessment of Health Literacy (2010)

6. infection	__plant	__virus	__don't know
7. alcoholism	__addiction	__recreation	__don't know
8. pregnancy	__birth	__childhood	__don't know
9. seizure	__dizzy	__calm	__don't know
10. dose	__sleep	__amount	__don't know
11. hormones	__growth	__harmony	__don't know

# Red Flags for Low Literacy



- ✓ Frequently missed appointments
- ✓ Incomplete registration forms
- ✓ Non-compliance with medication
- ✓ Unable to name medications, explain purpose or dosing
- ✓ Identifies pills by looking at them, not reading label
- ✓ Unable to give coherent, sequential history
- ✓ Ask fewer questions
- ✓ Lack of follow-through on tests or referrals

(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

# Intervention Strategies-Universal Precautions Approach

- You cannot tell by looking
- Higher literacy skills  $\neq$  understanding
- Anxiety can reduce ability to manage health information
- Everyone benefits from clear communication

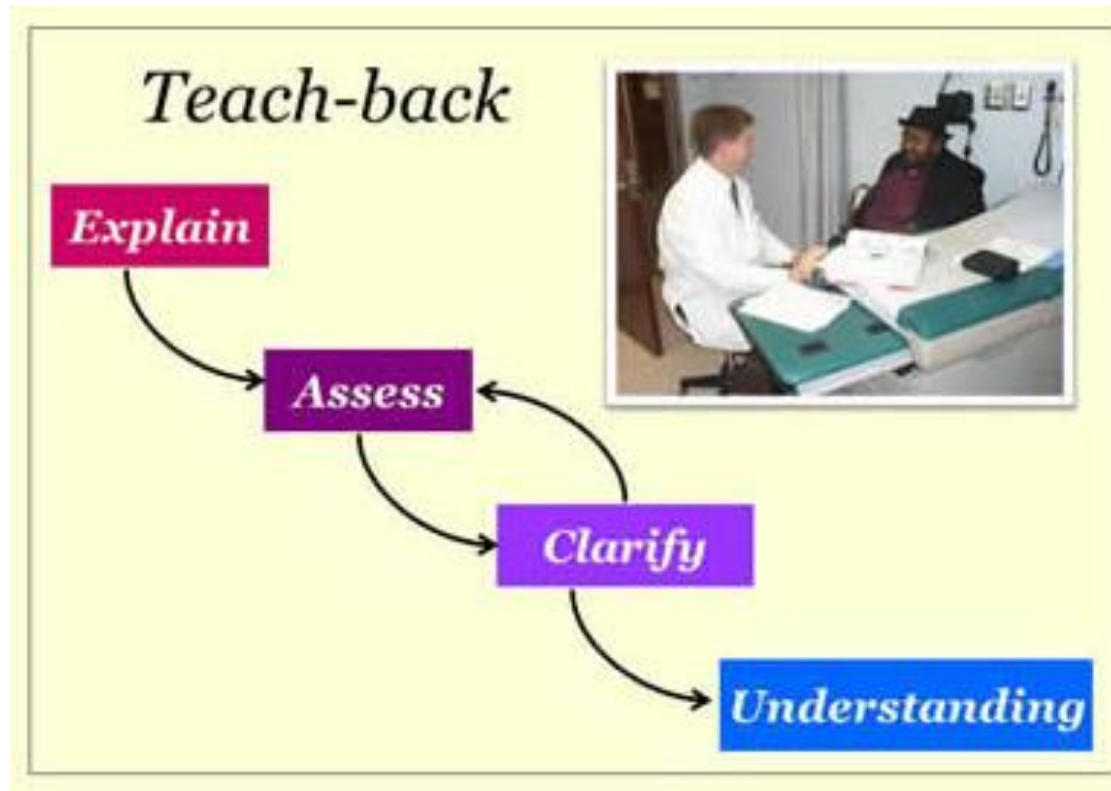
**(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)**

# Intervention Strategies-Spoken Communication

- Focus on “need to know” and “need to do”
- Use Teach-Back Method
- Demonstrate/draw pictures
- Use clearly written education materials

**(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)**

# Intervention Strategies-Teach-Back Method



(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

# Intervention Strategies-Teach-Back Method

## Confirm patient understanding

“Tell me what you’ve understood.”

“I want to make sure I explained your medicine clearly. Can you tell me how you will take your medicine?”



(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)



# Intervention Strategies-Written Communication

- Written materials alone do not adequately inform
- Clients prefer receiving key messages from their clinician with accompanying pamphlets
- Design easy to read materials (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade), plain language

(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

# Intervention Strategies-Tips for You

- ✓ Use plain language
- ✓ Limit information (3-5 key points)
- ✓ Be specific & concrete
- ✓ Demonstrate, draw pictures, use models
- ✓ Repeat/summarize
- ✓ Teach-Back (confirm understanding)
- ✓ Be positive, hopeful, empowering

(Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)

# Intervention Strategy



An educational program that encourages patients and families to ask 3 specific questions of their providers to better understand their health conditions and what they need to do to stay healthy

**What is my main problem?**

**What do I need to do?**

**Why is it important for me to do this?**

(National Patient Safety Foundation, 2012)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3EB-icaNKQ>

# Health Literacy: Pulling it all Together

Basics for Health Professionals

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 8w9kdcRgsI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w9kdcRgsI)

# Questions?

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