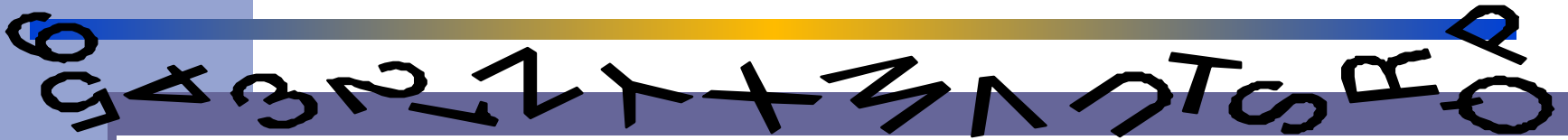


# *Health Literacy: Help Your Patients Understand*

**Health Literacy & Patient Safety**



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# Disclaimers:

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**“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”**

**George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)**

# Research shows that:

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- Literacy is a predictor of health status
- It is a stronger predictor than age, income, employment status, education level, or racial and ethnic group

# Up to ½ of US population may be at risk for...

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- Medical misunderstandings
- Mistakes
- Excess hospitalizations
- Poor health outcomes

# Why?

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- Reliance on the written word for patient instruction
- Increasingly complex health system
  - More medications
  - More tests and procedures
  - Growing self-care requirements

# Changes in the health care system

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	<u>45 Years Ago</u>	<u>Today</u>
<b>Treatment of Acute Myocardial Infarction</b>	■ 4 - 6 weeks bed rest in hospital	■ 2-4 days in hospital (M&R Guidelines)
<b>Available Prescription Drugs</b>	■ 650	■ 10,000 +
<b>Treatment of new onset diabetes</b>	■ 3 weeks in hospital 2 hours a day of diabetic education classes	■ outpatient 0-3 hours diabetic education classes written materials internet telemedicine

# “Patients won’t tell you.”

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% of patients who have **never** told:

- Supervisor 91%
- Children 53%
- Spouse 68%
- Anyone 19%



# Definitions:

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## General Literacy:

**“ An individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”**

**National Literacy Act of 1991**

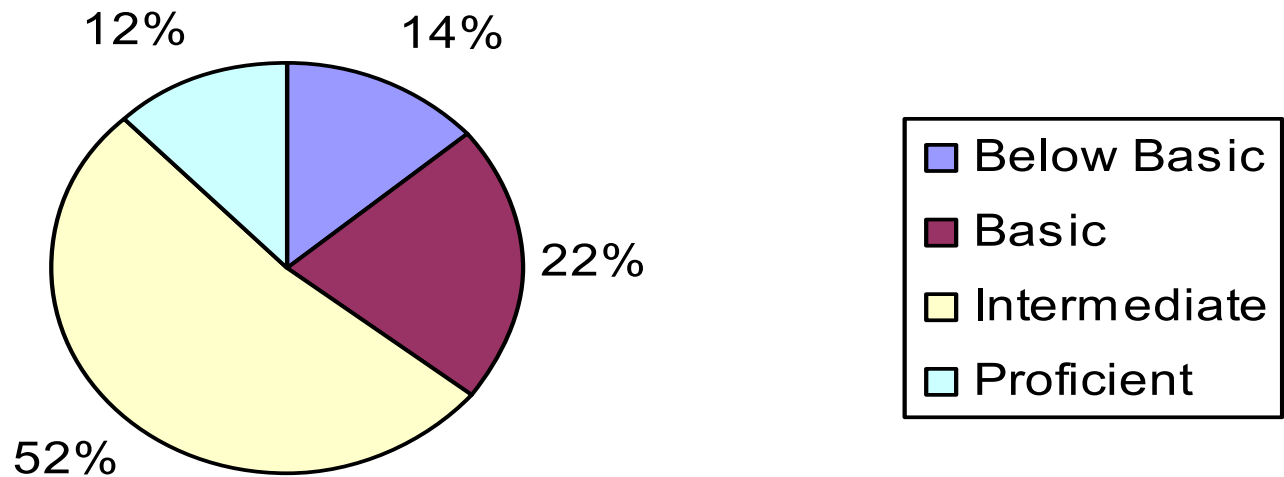
## Health Literacy:

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

**Healthy People 2010**

# 2003 National Adult Literacy Survey

## Health Literacy - 2003



# NALS Level 1

## Below Basic (14%)

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### **Able to:**

- Sign name
- Find a country in an article
- Total a bank deposit entry

### **Cannot consistently:**

- Understand the “gist” of an article.
- Use a bus schedule
- Enter information on a SS application

# NALS Level 2

## Basic (22%)

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### **Able to:**

- Find intersection on street map
- Locate information in newspaper article
- Determine difference in price on tickets

### **Cannot consistently:**

- Enter information into a vaccination record
- Identify information from a bar graph
- Write a brief letter of complaint

# What is it like?

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- The following passage simulates what a reader with low general literacy sees on the printed page.
- Read both sentences out loud.
- Hint: The words are written backwards and the first word is “cleaning”

# What is it like?

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GNINAELC – Ot erussa hgih ecnamrofrep,  
yllacidoirep naelc eht epat sdaeh dna  
natspac revenehw uoy eciton na  
noitalumucca fo tsud dna nworb-der edixo  
selcitrapp. Esu a nottoc baws denetsiom  
htiw lyporposi lohocla.

# What is it like?

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CLEANING – To assure high performance, periodically clean the tape heads and capstan whenever you notice an accumulation of dust and red-brown oxide particles. Use a cotton swab moistened with isopropyl alcohol.

# Many patients struggle with health reading tasks....

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	<u>% Incorrect</u>
■ Take medicine every 6 hours	22%
■ Take medicine on empty stomach	42%
■ Upper GI instructions (4th grade)	21%
■ Medicaid Rights (10th grade)	46%



# Estimated \$106 to \$238\* billion annual costs of poor health literacy...

## We all pay!

- 39% paid by Medicare through FICA taxes on workers
- 17% paid by employers
- 16% paid by patients out-of-pocket
- 14% paid by Medicaid
- The remaining 14% comes from other public and private sources.

\*publichealth.gwu.edu Accessed October 6, 2018

# Identifying Red Flags in Communication



*Patients who ...*

- Are unable to name medications, or explain purpose or timing of administration
- Have difficulty explaining their concerns
- Have no questions
- Act angry, passive, or clown around



**“Think like a wise man  
but communicate in the  
language of the people”**

**William Butler Yeats (1865 - 1939)**

# Explain things clearly using plain language

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- Slow down the pace of your speech
- Use analogies
  - *Arthritis and a creaky hinge on a door*
  - *<http://www.altoonafp.org/analogies.htm>*
- Use plain, non-medical language
  - *“Keep track of” instead of “monitor”*

# Using plain, non-medical language

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- Anti-inflammatory
- Benign
- Chronic
- Normal
- Referral
- Pain Killer
- Not cancer (not a problem)
- Have for many years
- What they should be
- Send you to another doctor

# Focus on key messages and repeat

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- Limit information by focusing on 1-3 key messages per visit
- Review each point and repeat several times
- Have other staff reinforce key messages

Vogel, DR et al. In Petterson, R *Visuals for Information: Research and Practice* 1989

# Guidelines for creating patient-friendly materials

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- Simple words (1-2 syllables)
- Short sentences (4-6 words)
- Short paragraphs (2-3 sentences)
- No medical jargon
- Headings and bullets
- Lots of white space

# What not to ask

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~~Do you understand?~~

~~Do you have any questions?~~





Thank You!