

Advancing Health Literacy: A Crucial Role for Public Librarians

MLA 2018 Annual Conference, Thursday, October 18, 2018

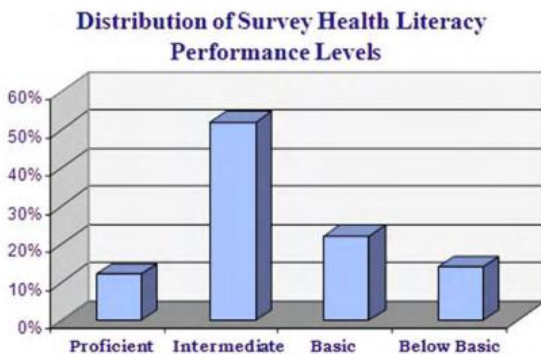
Presenter: Ruti Volk, MSI, AHIP, Patient Education and Health Literacy Program Lead, Michigan Medicine. r Volk@umich.edu

Fact: Literacy level is the strongest predictor of an individual's health status!

Concise definition of Health Literacy: The ability to find, know, and use health information to make choices each day.

Literacy Statistics from the NAAL study, 2003

Figure 2: Distribution of Health Literacy Performance Levels from the 2003 NAAL Health Literacy Survey



- 12% Proficient
- 52% Intermediate
- 22% Basic
- 14% Below Basic

36% of 242 million adults equals 87 million U.S. adults with low health literacy.

The problem of limited health literacy is greater among:

- Older adults
- Those who are poor
- People with limited education
- Minority populations
- Persons with limited English proficiency (LEP)

Numeracy Definition: The ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, to engage in and manage mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life.

Numeracy statistics from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012 study

Highest proficiency

- 12% of adults scored in the highest literacy proficiency level
- 9% scored in the highest numeracy level

Lowest proficiency

- 4% of adults scored in the lowest literacy proficiency level
- 10% of adults scored in the lowest numeracy level

Effects of low health literacy and numeracy:

People with low functional health literacy have poorer health status

- Have less compliance with treatment
- Make a greater number of medication/treatment errors
- Get fewer health screenings
- Have more incidence of delayed diagnosis

People with low health literacy have a much higher rate of health services utilization:

- People with low health literacy have a 50% increase risk of hospitalization.
- The annual health care costs of people with low health literacy are 4 times higher than those with average literacy.

Public Librarians at the Front Line

Initiatives

1. ALA/NNLM (National Network of Libraries of Medicine): Libraries Transform: Health Literacy Toolkit:
<http://www.ilovelibraries.org/librariestransform/health-literacy-toolkit-intro>
2. PLA/NNLM Promoting Healthy Communities Tools for Public Librarians
Health Community Tools for Public Librarians - <https://publiclibrary.health/>
3. MLA- CHIS - Putting the Consumer Health Information Specialization to Work in Public Libraries. Program provides training in providing health information services to consumers and recognition for the accomplishment of acquiring new health information skills. <https://www.mlanet.org/page/chis>

Best Consumer Health Web Resources:

- **MedlinePlus** - www.medlineplus.gov the National Institutes of Health's Web site for patients and their families and friends
- **Care Guides from Your Clinician** - <http://careguides.med.umich.edu/> Michigan Medicine Patient Education Clearinghouse includes print, audiovisual and web resources created or recommended by Michigan Medicine clinicians.

Where can I learn more about Health Literacy?

NLM/NNLM Health literacy page at <https://nmlm.gov/initiatives/topics/health-literacy> is a good starting point.

References

Health Literacy

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