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Tips for Engaging Patients With Low Health Literacy

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS: Joseph Sudano, MD, Case Western Reserve University; Joseph Daprano, MD, Case Western Reserve University, on behalf of Team Best Practices

How can we improve clinician-patient communication with patients with low literacy?

Recent surveys of US adults found that nearly 20% have low literacy,¹ while up to 36% of seniors may have low health literacy.² These adults may have limited understanding of medical labels and instructions, are more likely to report their health as poor, and have higher mortality rates compared to adults with ‘proficient’ health literacy.³ Adults who cannot read (or cannot read well) often rely on verbal sources of information, and may be reluctant to ask clarifying questions.⁴ This puts them at greater risk of poor health outcomes, including hypertension and diabetes control. To engage clinical teams on health literacy, Cardi-OH has developed this **interactive presentation**. Consider using this as a starting point at your next practice meeting. This presentation includes the below brief **American Medical Association video**.

Consider these 3 strategies to engage patients with low health literacy:⁵

1. Focus on key messages and repeat them verbally several times. Consider limiting to just 1-3 key messages per visit.



2. Use “teach back” techniques, asking patients to repeat in their own words what they need to know or do. This is to test how well you explained a concept.



3. Use appropriate educational materials to enhance interaction and serve as visual reminders. Choose patient handouts with clear graphics to depict instructions. Evaluate all written materials for appropriateness.



References

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