



# CARDI•OH

Ohio Cardiovascular and Diabetes Health Collaborative



In partnership with:



# Health Literacy: Talking With Your Team

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# Objectives



1. Understand how low health literacy affects patients' health outcomes.
2. Review simple strategies to communicate more effectively with patients who have low health literacy.

# Brief Video: American Medical Association (AMA)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubPkdpGHWAQ>

# Discussion



What are your reactions to the video?

# Video Highlighted Concerns

- Challenge in identifying patients who have low health literacy
- Difficulty understanding medication dosing instructions
- Hesitation to ask for clarification on instructions
- Lack of familiarity with terminology, e.g., ‘hypertension’
- Anxiety and fear of judgment from the clinical team
- Illness resulting from misunderstanding health information

# Low Health Literacy is Pervasive



- Only 12% of US adults have ‘proficient’ health literacy
- 36% have ‘basic’ or ‘below basic’ health literacy
- 20% read below a 5th-grade reading level

# How Does Low Health Literacy Present?

- Adults who cannot read well:
  - Rely on verbal sources for information
  - May hesitate to ask questions
  - Often do not self-identify
- Remember both language and number literacy are affected

# Why Does it Matter?



Poor health literacy is a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income, employment status, education level, and race.



# Single-Item Screening Tool for Health Literacy



*“How often do you need to have someone help you when you read instructions, pamphlets, or other written material from your doctor or pharmacy?”*

**1-Never    2-Rarely    3-Sometimes    4-Often    5-Always**

**Scoring:  $\geq 3$  indicates some difficulty reading printed health related material (i.e., positive screen)**

# Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Low Health Literacy in Clinical Care



## 1. Implement patient-centered visits

# #1 Patient-Centered Visits

- Engage in dialogue with the patient
- Listen more & speak less
- Encourage the patient to ask questions
  - *What is my main problem?*
  - *What do I need to do?*
  - *Why is it important?*

# Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Low Health Literacy in Clinical Care



1. Implement patient-centered visits
2. Explain things clearly and use plain language

# #2 Explain Things Clearly and Use Plain Language



- Slow down: talk more slowly
- Simplify language: “blood sugar” instead of “glucose”
- Clarify terminology: “hypertension” = “high blood pressure”

# Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Low Health Literacy in Clinical Care



1. Implement patient-centered visits
2. Explain things clearly and use plain language
3. Focus on key messages

# #3 Focus on Key Messages

- Focus on 1 - 3 key messages per visit
- Review each point and repeat several times
- Staff should reinforce key messages
  - (e.g., at discharge, after-visit paperwork)

# Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Low Health Literacy in Clinical Care



1. Implement patient-centered visits
2. Explain things clearly and use plain language
3. Focus on key messages
4. Use “teach-back” techniques



# #4 Use “Teach Back” Techniques

- Ask patients to describe in their own words what they need to know or do
- Not a test of the patient, but of how well we explained a concept
- Assess for understanding and, if necessary, re-teach the information

# Evidence-Based Strategies to Address Low Health Literacy in Clinical Care



1. Implement patient-centered visits
2. Explain things clearly and use plain language
3. Focus on key messages
4. Use “teach-back” techniques
5. Use appropriate educational materials to enhance understanding

# #5 Use Appropriate Educational Materials to Enhance Understanding

- Evaluate reading level of written health education materials
  - <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>
  - Choose materials with images or graphics to add clarity
  - Emphasize what the patient should do

# Summary

- Low health literacy is pervasive and can result in poor health outcomes
- Since low health literacy can be difficult to identify, consider using a screening tool to assess reading ability
- Utilize evidence-based strategies to address low health literacy as a routine part of clinical care
  1. Implement patient-centered visits
  2. Explain things clearly and use plain language
  3. Focus on key messages
  4. Use “teach-back” techniques
  5. Use appropriate educational materials to enhance understanding

# Next Steps/Future Work



What would a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) quality improvement effort on health literacy look like in our office?