

Health Literacy & Universal Precautions



Personal Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others. **Numeracy** is the ability to understand and use numbers. **Organizational health literacy** is the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.

Why should we care about health literacy?

Facts

- ✓ 88% of U.S. adults have low health literacy
- ✓ Low health literacy is the strongest predictor of health outcomes.
- ✓ Low health literacy increases hospitalization & health care costs

Learning Center EBP Project

Recommendations:

- ✓ Do not use a health literacy screening tool for routine clinical use.
- ✓ Promote a universal precautions approach with a focus on clear communication

What is a health literacy universal precautions approach and why should we use it?

A health literacy **universal precautions approach** means treating all patients as if they are at risk of not understanding health information.

Even people with proficient health literacy skills may not attribute the same meaning to health terms and instructions as professionals do.

Health literacy can be situational. For example, it may depend on the complexity of the information and the patient's relevant experiences and stress level.

Most people have trouble understanding and retaining health information when sick, frightened, or in pain.

Everyone deserves clear, actionable information

Key Communication Strategies

- Warm greeting
- Eye contact
- Listen
- Use plain, non-medical language
- Slow down
- Limit content
- Show how it's done
- Use teach-back
- Repeat key points
- Use graphics
- Invite patient participation
- Encourage questions