

From Exam Room Jargon to Living Room Language: Librarians' Roles in Improving Healthcare Conversations

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Project funded by the National Library of Medicine under Contract No. N01-LM-6-3503 with the University of Illinois at Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences. March 2008 – August 2009

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Burgeoning Healthcare Crisis

There are many reasons why patients do not understand what healthcare providers tell them. A key reason is inadequate health literacy. This is the capacity of individuals to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate decisions regarding their health.

Inadequate health literacy affects everyone regardless of background or educational level. Studies show that literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, educational level, or racial or ethnic group.

Exam Room Jargon

Communication is essential for the effective delivery of healthcare. There is often a mismatch between a healthcare provider's level of communication and a patient's level of comprehension.

Evidence shows that patients often misinterpret or do not understand much of the information given to them by their healthcare provider. This lack of understanding can lead to medication errors, missed appointments, adverse medical outcomes, and issues regarding informed consent.

Up to 80% of medical information provided by healthcare practitioners is forgotten immediately by patients. Furthermore, almost half of the information remembered is incorrect.

More than 90 million people lack sufficient health literacy to effectively under- take and execute needed medical treatments and preventive care.

Increasing Complexity

The need for today's patients to be "health literate" is greater than ever due to our complex healthcare environment and increasing requirements for self-care.

Treatment	35 Years Ago	Today
Acute Myocardial Infarction	6 weeks bed rest in hospital	2-4 days in hospital (M&R Guidelines)
Available Prescription Drugs	650	10,000+
New Onset Diabetes	• 3 weeks in hospital • 2 hours a day of diabetic education classes	• Outpatient • 0-3 hours diabetic education classes • Written materials • Internet • Telemedicine

We all pay!

Inadequate health literacy results in:

- Patients receiving less preventive healthcare or diagnosis of advanced illness.
- More use of expensive emergency services.
- Excess hospitalizations and longer hospital stays.

**Cost to taxpayers is
\$50-\$73 billion annually.**

Change Agents in a Time of Crisis

Great Rivers Partners For Health-e People is a collaborative community project, funded by a \$35,000 grant from the National Library of Medicine, that uniquely positions librarians as health literacy educators.

Partnering organizations in La Crosse, Wisconsin, are working together to raise awareness of problems related to health literacy.

- La Crosse Area Community Literacy Coalition
- Gundersen Lutheran Health System
- Franciscan Skemp Healthcare/Mayo Health System

Health Literacy Awareness: Plain Language for Your Patients

Our Solution for Healthcare Providers

An online course to enhance verbal and written communication by encouraging healthcare providers to:

- Use plain or "living room" language, free of medical jargon, with their patients.
- Answer 3 simple questions for their patients.

Health-e People Ask Questions

Our Solution for Patients

An online or instructor-led course to encourage patients to:

- Become better partners in their healthcare.
- Get information about their health.
- Understand what to do or how to use information to stay healthy.
- Ask 3 simple questions of their healthcare provider.

3 Simple Questions

What is my main problem?

- Healthcare provider will provide a diagnosis.

What do I need to do?

- Healthcare provider will provide a treatment plan.

Why is it important for me to do this?

- Healthcare provider will explain what can happen if the treatment plan is not followed.

Less Jargon – More Living Room Language

In an ever-changing healthcare environment, health sciences librarians serve as catalysts in improving healthcare conversations between healthcare providers and their patients.

