Patient Education and Health Literacy in Primary Care

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Introduction

- Health literacy is “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

Healthy People 2010: http://www.healthypeople.gov
Topics of Discussion

- Health Literacy Overview
- What you can do
- Engaging Patients in their Care
- Resources
NAAL 2003 Data Overview

- 12% Proficient: complex and challenging literacy activities
- 53% Intermediate: moderately challenging literacy activities
- 22% Basic: simple everyday literacy activities
- 14% Below Basic: no more than the most simple and concrete literacy activities
NAAL 2003 Data Overview

- Women > Men
- White, Asian > Black, Hispanic
- Age 65 plus: lower health literacy
- Poverty level: lower health literacy
- Medicare/Medicaid: 27% / 30% Below Basic
- The average American reads at an eighth grade level
Remember:

- Hard to read: Fragmin injection is indicated for prophylaxis of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) which may lead to pulmonary embolism.
- Easy to read: A shot of Fragmin is given to keep blood clots from forming in your legs. This will also help keep blood clots from forming in your lungs.
Research

- Williams, et al.
  - 42% could not understand directions for taking meds on empty stomach
  - 26% could not understand essential information in an appointment slip
  - 60% could not understand standard informed consent document
Research

- Davis, et al. study on colorectal cancer screening showed that patients:
  - Often don’t understand cancer control terms like “screening”
  - Often don’t understand basic anatomy terms such as “colon”
  - Often don’t understand diagnostic terms such as “tumor” or “lesion”
Research

- Physician/Patient communication literature indicates that immediately after leaving the MD’s office:
  - Patients are able to correctly identify only 50% of critical information just given to them
Barriers to Learning

- Healthcare system and language
- Patient’s knowledge of own body
- Stress
- Pain
- Power imbalance
- Information overload
- Shame
What You Can Do

- Be aware of issue
- Incorporate knowledge into practice
- Create a shame-free work place
- Use clear communication in all patient interactions
  - Use plain language
  - Avoid medical jargon
- Limit information provided to two or three important points at a time
What You Can Do

- Use “teach back” and “show back” technique
- Review your print materials to ensure they are at 8th grade level
- Get family involved, have them take notes
- Give written materials for patient to review at home as reinforcement
- Provide Interpreter service for non English speaking patients
- Assess your Medical Practice

* http://nchealthliteracy.org/toolkit/
Engaging Patients in Their Care

- Use “Ask Me 3” tool from the National Patient Safety Foundation
- Practical tool that creates awareness and reinforces principles of clear health communication
- Improves patient-provider communication
- [http://www.npsf.org](http://www.npsf.org)
Engaging Patients in Their Care

- Encourages patients to ask questions and get involved in their care
  - What is my main problem?
  - What do I need to do?
  - Why is it important for me to do this?
Engaging Patients in Their Care

- Use the “Teach Back” technique
  - Have patient repeat back what you taught them in their own words
    - Say “I want to make sure I did a good job of teaching you about your blood pressure, could you repeat back to me what we just talked about”
  - If patient is unable to teach back, try another approach
    - Use open ended questions: “how would you know if”, “tell me what you would do if”, “who would you call if” etc.
Resources

- American Medical Association 2006 Health Literacy Tool Kit
- Institute of Medicine 2004 report: “Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion”
References

Institute of Medicine:  www.iom.edu
JCAHO:  www.jointcommission.org
AMA:  www.ama-assn.org
NAAL:  http://www.nces.ed.gov/naal/
Harvard School of Public Health: Health Literacy Studies:
    http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/index.html
National Institute for literacy:  www.nifl.gov
Plain Language Network:  www.plainlanguage.gov
References