



## **HEALTH LITERACY RESOURCES**

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## Health Literacy Resources

According to “Healthy People 2010,” health literacy is “the ability to obtain, process, and understand health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.” This means that patients must be able to understand the information given to them by their health care providers, and translate that into the appropriate actions to follow and comply with medical advice. The health literate individual is able to read at an appropriate level, listen actively, problem-solve, and make decisions based on the information given.

The 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) found that only 3% of individuals could be considered proficient readers. 17% had “adequate” health literacy skills but may have problems with informed consent and quantitative skills. 32% could generally handle every day skills, but lost abilities when sick. 27% were marginally literate (below 8<sup>th</sup> grade), and the remainder of the population (21%) was functionally illiterate with less than a 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Since illness, stress and aging tend to lower one’s ability to comprehend, the veteran population is even more at risk of suffering the consequences of low health literacy.

The economic impact of low health literacy is enormous. Using 1998 figures, the National Academy on an Aging Society estimated that the inability to understand medical directions cost over \$73 billion in additional health care costs.

The following resources have been compiled by the Consumer Health Library Panel to assist VHA staff in working more effectively with our veteran patients. They include health literacy materials, readability formulas, free resources for pictograms and graphics, and sites that assist in writing low-literacy patient education materials. It is divided into the following sections:

- Health Literacy Books
- Health Literacy Bibliographies
- Health Literacy Web Sites
- Development of Patient Education Materials
- Online Videos
- Readability Formulas
- Free Health Clip Art, Graphics and other Illustrations

**“Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it, and above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.”—*An Adventure with a Genius: Recollections of Joseph Pulitzer.***

## Health Literacy Books

Nielsen-Bohlman, Lynn et al. **Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion**. National Academy Press. ISBN 0309091179. 2004.

Osborne, Helen. **Health Literacy From A To Z: Practical Ways to Communicate Your Health**. Jones & Bartlett. ISBN 0673745502. 2004.

Schwartzberg, Joanne G., et al. **Understanding Health Literacy: Implications for Medicine and Public Health**. American Medical Association. ISBN 0579476309. Dec. 2004.

Schwartzberg, Joanne G. **Health Literacy: Help Your Patients Understand**. American Medical Association. ISBN 1579475027. 2003.

Doak, Cecelia, et al. **Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills**. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. ISBN 0397551614. 1996.

**Literacy and Health Outcomes**. Prepared for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. 2004. Available online at [www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/literacy/contents.pdf](http://www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/literacy/contents.pdf).

## Health Literacy Bibliographies

### **Understanding Health Literacy and Its Barriers**

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/cbm/healthliteracybarriers.html>

Part of the National Library of Medicine's "Current Bibliographies in Medicine" series, this covers January 1998 through November 2003 and contains 651 citations.

### **Health Literacy (Current Bibliographies in Medicine 2000-2001)**

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/cbm/hliteracy.html#5>

Each bibliography in the Current Bibliographies in Medicine (CBM) series covers a distinct subject area of biomedicine and is intended to fulfill a current awareness function. Citations are usually derived from searching a variety of online databases, including MEDLINE®, AVLINE®, BIOETHICSLINE®, CANCERLIT®, CATLINE®, HEALTHSTAR™, POPLINE™, and TOXLINE®. The only criterion for the inclusion of a particular published work is its relevance to the topic being presented; the format, ownership, or location of the material is not considered. This bibliography covers January 1990 through October 1999.

## Health Literacy Web Sites

### **American Medical Association Foundation Health Literacy**

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8115.html>

The AMA Foundation sponsors a health literacy campaign, in recognition that limited patient literacy affects medical diagnosis and treatment. The AMA Foundation has been working to raise awareness of health literacy within the health care community. An overview of the problem, news, literacy kit, and tips on how to become involved are included at the site.

### **America's Literacy Directory**

<http://www.literacydirectory.org/>

America's Literacy Directory (ALD) is a national directory of literacy service providers available via the Internet and the National Institute for Literacy's toll-free number. The ALD connects employers, learners, volunteers, social service agencies, and others to current information about literacy service providers in all 50 states and the U.S. territories.

### **Ask Me 3**

<http://askme3.org>

Ask Me 3 is a new patient education program designed to promote communication between health care providers and patients, in order to improve health outcomes. It is sponsored by the Partnership for Clear Health Communications, a national coalition of health organizations that are working together to promote awareness and solutions for low health literacy. Funding is provided by Pfizer (<http://www.pfizerhealthliteracy.org/>). The site includes presentation tool kits for professionals and patients, fact sheets, brochures, statistics, logos and guidelines, and more.

### **Center for Healthcare Strategies Health Literacy Resources**

<http://www.chcs.org/resource/hl.html>

The Center provides nine fact sheets on a variety of health literacy topics, as well as a bibliography containing more than 200 references used to prepare those fact sheets. This bibliography includes 226 documents published between January 1990 and December 2002.

### **Harvard School of Public Health—Health Literacy Studies**

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/>

This site is designed for professionals in health and education who are interested in health literacy. It contains introductions to Health Literacy, literature reviews, research reports, health education materials, a 'How To' section on creating and evaluating written materials, curricula, and links to web sites related to health and literacy. Its "Health Literacy Literature" provides bibliographies from January 1990 to December 2002 on the subject.

### **Health and Literacy Special Collection**

<http://www.worlded.org/us/health/lincs/index.htm>

The Health & Literacy Special Collection is maintained by World Education, Inc., with funding from the National Institute for Literacy LINCS project. Health curricula for literacy or ESOL classes, resources to provide basic health information in simple language, information about the link between literacy and health status, and links to organizations dedicated to health and literacy education are available.

### **Health Literacy Month**

<http://www.healthliteracymonth.org/>

October is Health Literacy Month, and this site provides facts, articles, links, logos and posters, fact sheets, suggestions for programs and campaigns, ongoing programs, and more. Sponsored by a commercial Health Literacy organization.

### **Health Literacy: Responding to the Need for Help**

[http://www.medicareed.org/content/CMEPubDocs/Health\\_Literacy\\_Report\\_Feb2001.pdf](http://www.medicareed.org/content/CMEPubDocs/Health_Literacy_Report_Feb2001.pdf)

This 33-page 2001 report by Kristen Kieffer defines health literacy and discusses the individual and societal consequences of inadequate health literacy. It also highlights programs and efforts that address the needs of people with low health literacy and illustrates the techniques they use to identify and assist this population. Finally, this report provides guidelines for program administrators or coordinators to follow in establishing health literacy efforts of their own.

### **Health Resources and Services Administration Center for Quality—Health Literacy**

<http://www.hrsa.gov/quality/healthlit.htm>

The HRSA highlights health literacy as an objective in **Healthy People 2010 (HP 2010)**. Health Literacy, as defined in HP 2010, 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.” The site lists literacy facts, funded projects in the United States, and links to other organizations.

### **Healthy People 2010. Chapter 11: Health Communication**

[http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/html/volume1/11healthcom.htm#\\_Toc490471352](http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/html/volume1/11healthcom.htm#_Toc490471352)

This chapter of Healthy People 2010 emphasizes that effective communication cannot take place without considering the literacy levels of both patients and materials. Issues and trends, population disparities, opportunities for health care professionals, and 2010 objectives are included.

### **Institute of Medicine (IOM) Committee on Health Literacy**

<http://www.iom.edu/project.asp?id=3827>

This project of the IOM has published the 2004 report **Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion**. A brief overview of the report, health literacy in the news, and other resources are available.

### **Literacy and Health In America**

<http://www.ets.org/research/pic/literacy&health.pdf>

Dr. Rima Rudd et al, Harvard, focus on issues surrounding literacy and health. They use tasks from these same large-scale literacy assessments that were judged to involve health-related materials about such topics as drugs and alcohol, disease prevention and treatment, safety and accident prevention, first aid, emergencies, and staying healthy. The authors identified 191 tasks and then used them to create a Health Activities Literacy Scale (HALS) that was then linked back to the NALS database. This report links the use of literacy skills to the health context in which they are applied; considerably beyond just medical interventions. And it's important in reinforcing and extending the evidence that those with limited literacy skills also have limited health literacy skills.

### **Literacy and Health Outcomes**

[www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/literacy/contents.pdf](http://www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/literacy/contents.pdf)

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) commissioned this evidence report from the RTI International—University of North Carolina Evidence-based Practice Center (RTI-UNC EPC). The systematic review consolidates and analyzes the body of literature that has been produced to date regarding the relationship between literacy and health outcomes and the evidence about interventions intended to improve the health of people with low literacy. From this table of contents, users can click on the chapter of interest.

### **National Assessment of Adult Literacy**

<http://nces.ed.gov/naal/>

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) is a nationally representative and continuing assessment of English language literacy skills of American adults. It seeks to describe the status of adult literacy in the United States, report on national trends, and identify relationships between literacy and selected characteristics of adults. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which sponsors the NAAL, has conducted adult literacy assessments since 1985. A nationally representative sample of adults will be assessed again in 2003, providing the first indication of the nation's progress in adult literacy since 1992. Historical data, publications and other resources, and assessment designs are included.

### **National Institute for Literacy**

<http://www.nifl.gov/>

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) was created by the National Literacy Act of 1991, when a bipartisan Congressional coalition acted on the literacy field's request for a federal office focused solely on literacy. The Institute serves as a focal point for public and private activities that support the development of high-quality regional, state, and national literacy services. It focuses on all forms of literacy, including health literacy. A listserv is available.

### **National Literacy and Health Program**

<http://www.nlhp.cpha.ca/>

The Canadian Public Health Association provides resources to help health professionals serve clients with low literacy skills. These include a Plain Language Service, a document on designing medication packaging and labeling for seniors with low literacy, newsletters and reports.

### **National Network of Libraries of Medicine—Health Literacy**

<http://nnlm.gov/scr/conhlth/hlthlit.htm#Skills%20Needed%20for%20Health%20Literacy>

Health Literacy is highlighted in a chapter from "Consumer Health: An Online Manual," written for librarians. Contents include definition, Skills needed for health literacy, background, role of the consumer health librarian, support, Health Literacy organizations and programs, bibliographies and webliographies, and Health Literacy listservs. While somewhat dated (last updated in 2000), much of the information is still valuable.

### **Pfizer Clear Health Communication Initiative**

<http://www.pfizerhealthliteracy.com/>

Pfizer is a member of the AskMe3 organization, and sponsors a number of health literacy resources here.

### **The Plain Language Initiative**

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>

This government web site offers information on the United States government's Plain Language initiative through examples, guidelines for content and layout in documents, an online tutorial, and numerous resources including links to writing tools and winners of the "worst manual contest."

### **The Virginia Adult Education Health Literacy Toolkit**

<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/publications/healthlit/>

The Virginia Adult Education Health Literacy Toolkit is a one-stop resource for adult literacy and ESOL programs' health literacy education needs. It provides extensive resources to help educators understand the diverse health literacy needs of adult learners, better understand the U.S. health care system, employ creative and productive approaches to incorporate health education into classes and curricula, and more. While the Toolkit focuses on Virginia, the majority of the information, teaching ideas and teaching materials it contains are useful nationwide.

## **Development of Patient Education Materials**

### **University of Virginia Tips on Developing Patient Education**

<http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/health-education/provider.cfm>

This site contains the JCAHO requirements, criteria for evaluating material, quality assurance standards, and more.

### **Patient Education: An Author's Guide**

<http://www.med.utah.edu/pated/authors/>

The University of Utah has compiled a useful guide on all aspects of writing for patients.

### **Consumer Health: An Online Manual**

<http://www.nlm.gov/scr/conhlth/hlthlit.htm>

From the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, this manual provides information for librarians on their roles in health literacy.

### **Clear and Simple: Developing Effective Print Materials for Low Literate Readers**

<http://cancer.gov/cancerinformation/clearandsimple>

The National Cancer Institute has developed this guide, outlining a process for developing publications for people with limited-literacy skills. The process was derived from communications, health education, and literacy research and practice. In addition, writers who have produced low-literacy materials contributed their expertise. Thus, the guide features both proven principles and a discussion of the real life issues that individuals developing low-literacy materials face, such as the constraints of time, budget, organizational pressures, and the Government publications process.

### **Patient/Family Education Author's Guide**

[http://vaww.collage.research.med.va.gov/Resources/Documents/Author\\_Guide.pdf](http://vaww.collage.research.med.va.gov/Resources/Documents/Author_Guide.pdf)

The Wausau, Wisconsin Hospital author's guide is on Collage, VA Intranet.

### **Written Materials Resource Manual for Patient Health Education (Note: VHA Intranet)**

<http://vaww.tampa.med.va.gov/patientEdu/Written%20Materials%20Resource%20Manual%20-%20PHE.doc>

Developed by the Patient/Family Health Education Review Subcommittee at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital, Tampa, this manual assists staff members in writing quality health education materials.

## **Online Videos**

### **AMA Foundation's Health Literacy Video**

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8035.html>

The 20-minute video, also included in the AMA's Health Literacy Introductory Kit, can be viewed in its entirety at this link. It is designed to raise awareness and spark discussion about patients' low health literacy skills.

### **In Plain Language—Rima Rudd**

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/video.html>

*In Plain Language* was produced by Dr. Rima Rudd and Dr. William DeJong, with a team of Health Literacy Studies professionals and researchers. This 15-minute video/DVD was developed for medical and public health professionals who are interested in learning about adult literacy in the US and implications for medicine and for public health.

## **Readability Formulas**

### **How to Test For Readability (SMOG index)**

[http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/how\\_to/smog\\_2.pdf](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/how_to/smog_2.pdf)

### **The Fog Index and Readability Formulas**

<http://www.klariti.com/business-writing/Fog-Index-Readability-Formulas.shtml>

### **Fry's Readability Graph**

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/fry/fry.html>

### **Readability Formulas (Flesch Reading Ease & Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level)**

<http://csep.psyc.memphis.edu/cohmetrix/readabilityresearch.htm>

### **Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM)**

[http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/HealthEd/PDF/PtEd\\_REALM\\_Instr.PDF](http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/HealthEd/PDF/PtEd_REALM_Instr.PDF) (Examiner's Instruction Sheet)

[http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/HealthEd/PDF/PtEd\\_REALM\\_Examiner\\_WordList.PDF](http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/HealthEd/PDF/PtEd_REALM_Examiner_WordList.PDF) (Word list)

### **Readability Testing (SMOG, REALM, MS WORD) NOTE: On the VHA's Intranet**

<http://www1.va.gov/visns/visn02/vet/ed/articles/readability.doc>

## **Free Health Clip Art, Graphics and other Illustrations**

NOTE: While the graphics and images may be free, certain restrictions may be noted at the sites. Please be sure to follow all copyright guidelines when utilizing the images.

### **USP Pictograms**

<http://www.usp.org/search.html?search=pictograms>

The USP's pictograms are images representing proper ways to take or store medications, precautions, or other important information about a medication that a health care provider should provide to his or her patient.

### **National Cancer Institute Visuals Online**

<http://visualsonline.cancer.gov/>

The NCI Visuals Online database contains images from the collections of the Communication Services Branch and Mass Media Office of the Office of Communications, National Cancer Institute.

### **CDC's Public Health Image Library (PHIL)**

<http://phil.cdc.gov/Phil/default.asp>

PHIL is an extensive collection of still images, image sets, and multimedia files related to public health.

### **CDC's Diabetes Clip Art**

<http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/gallery.htm>

The clip art found here was developed for "Take Charge of Your Diabetes," a CDC publication that is a guidebook for people with diabetes.

### **Health Communications Materials Network**

<http://www.hcmn.org/clipart/>

From Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs, this site presents an online (and eventually a CD-ROM) database of clip art which can be used as a reference tool in developing health communication materials. The art in the database is taken from materials in its Media/Materials Clearinghouse, as well as art that is sent in from HCMN members from their own project work.

### **National Eye Institute Photos, Images, and Videos**

<http://www/nei.nih.gov/photo/>

The NEI provides photos and images on eye anatomy, disease simulations, clinician/patient interactions, and more.

**Health on the Net Foundation Media**

<http://www.hon.ch/HONmedia/>

**HONmedia** is an unique repository of over 6'800 medical images and videos, pertaining to 1,700 topics and themes. This database has been created manually by HON and new image links are constantly being added from the world-wide Web.

**Administration on Aging Multimedia Gallery**

[http://www.aoa.gov/press/multimed/photos/multimed\\_photos.asp](http://www.aoa.gov/press/multimed/photos/multimed_photos.asp)

The AoA features photos from Aging Magazine 1975-1995 and a Seniors Photo Gallery.

**MediaNet** (NOTE: This is a VA Intranet site and not accessible on the Internet)

<http://vaww.mam.lrn.va.gov:8080/Cumulus/MediaNetHomeFrames.htm>

This system contains media production assets from a variety of VA program offices, including the Employee Education System (EES); Office of Public Affairs; Audio Visual Services, VACO; and Media Production Services throughout VA.

**Health Canada Graphics**

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/media/photos/index.html>

This Canadian public health site features a variety of graphics and photos.