Health Literacy from the Medical Perspective

What UNM Hospital is Doing to Address Health Literacy
What is Health Literacy— from the Medical Perspective?

- An individual’s ability to obtain, process, understand and use health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.
  - Healthy People 2010

- An organization’s ability to make it easier for people to navigate, understand, and use information and services...
  - Institute of Medicine, “Attributes of a Health Literate Organization,” 2012
The Challenge We Face

Knowledge & skills of patients

Health Literacy: Patient Action

Demands & complexity of health information and systems

Health Literacy: Part I "The Basics"
World Health Communication Associates: WHCA Action Guides Project
2009 World Health Communication Associates Ltd
Who Is UNM Hospital?

- 630 beds and 24 off-site clinics providing over 500,000 outpatient visits annually
- New Mexico's only teaching hospital
- Almost half our patients live in poverty
- Race/Ethnicity
  - Almost ½ Hispanic/Latino
  - About ¼ Anglo
  - About 10% Native American
  - 2% Black
  - 1% Asian
  - 13% other
What Factors Make It Hard to Have Adequate Health Literacy?

- What is hard when you go for medical care?
- The complexity of health care systems
- Not enough knowledge of medical concepts, terms, anatomy
- Potential barriers of race, language, culture, poverty, gender, illness, and literacy
“The Health Literacy of America’s Adults” Report

- Only 12% are in the proficient level!
- 75 million adults are in below basic and basic levels

- But wait!! What does this say about health systems?

Source: 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy
Improving Americans’ Health Literacy

• Video: What Is Our Responsibility?
What is UNMH doing to...

- become an easier system to figure out?
- help patients improve their health literacy skills and knowledge?

- New full-time Health Literacy Specialist Position (2012)
- Standing committees
- And…
Easy-to-Understand Print and Web Info

• Making materials “reader-friendly”

• Health Literacy Specialist reviews and revises lots of documents

• Classes in creating reader-friendly materials

• Encouraging “living room” vs. medical language.

• Materials are translated into Spanish and Vietnamese
Think of an Easier Way to Say These Sentences

1. This medication reduces intra-operative bleeding. (Remove the jargon)

2. Be sure to call your healthcare provider if you experience recurrent episodes of nausea or vomiting. (So when would you call?)
Interpersonal Communication

• Interpreter Language Services
  • 20 on-site interpreters
  • Interpreters by video and telephone

• Encourage use of “plain language” or “living room language” in all face-to-face interactions
  • Awareness training with providers and staff
  • Plain Language Thesaurus on website

• Verbal checks for patient understanding…
Starting a “Teach-Back” Initiative

- Provider or staff ask the patient to restate in his or her own words.
- Patients can only follow a plan if they understand it!
Making It Easier to Use Our System

- Other efforts to improve our environment to better meet the needs of patients
  - Hard work
  - Commitment
  - Progress!
Contact

Audrey Riffenburgh (ariffenburgh@salud.unm.edu)
Senior Health Literacy Specialist
UNM Hospitals
Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Phone: 272-5101