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EUROPEAN PAIN FEDERATION

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plain talking

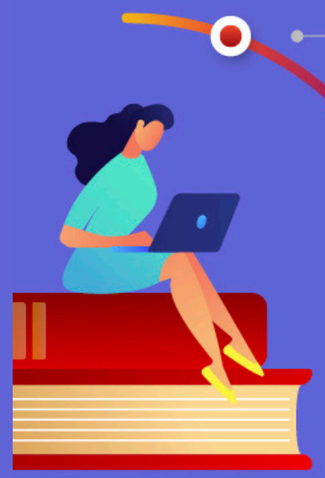
‘Clear Communication is key in Health Literacy’

Health Literacy

Health literacy describes how you can use your literacy and social skills to communicate with others about your health in everyday life. For example, when you attend a doctor's appointment or a support group meeting.

It also explains how you may be able to take information from these activities, or from what you read in books or the internet, and use it to help with your pain.

Components of Health Literacy



- Being able to access and understand information about pain
- Feeling understood and supported by clinicians
- Being able to talk with your clinician
- Being actively involved in your health decisions with your clinician
- Having social supports around you for your pain
- Navigating the health system

‘Clear Communication is key in Health Literacy’

Health Literacy information for healthcare professionals

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Health Literacy as:

“THE COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL SKILLS which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which PROMOTE AND MAINTAIN GOOD HEALTH”

and deems HEALTH LITERACY to be a major public HEALTH CONCERN, which impacts negatively on both patients and HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

How you can recognise a patient with lower levels of Health Literacy?

- They don’t ask questions and engage less with their clinicians
- They frequently miss appointments
- They often show poor adherence to treatment

However,

while certain populations may be more affected by lower levels of Health Literacy, you should assume that all patients may require support in developing their Health Literacy skills

What can you do about this?

Incorporate Health Literacy sensitive approaches into your daily practice

Use **Plain Language** and avoid medical jargon where possible with both written and verbal communication

Limit information to **3 TO 5 MESSAGES** per session

Encourage your patients to ask questions using

‘Ask Me 3®’

What is my main problem?
What do I need to do?
Why is it important for me to do this?

Facilitate patients to become active decision makers in their healthcare

‘USE THE TEACH-BACK METHOD’

- Provide clear information in shorter segments
- Ask your patient to repeat the information back to you
- Assess the repeated information for accuracy
- Rephrase the information until your patient demonstrates they understand

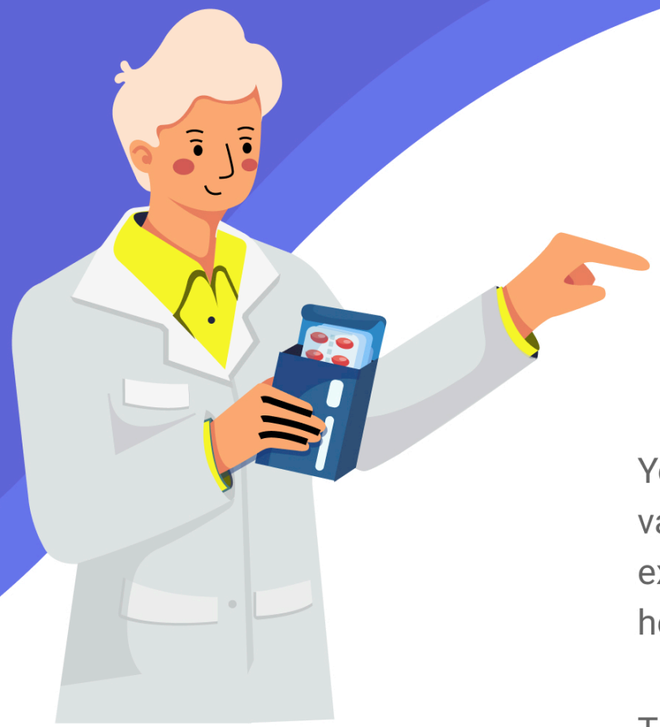
‘Clear Communication is key in Health Literacy’

Health Literacy information for patients

Health Literacy

is a person’s ability to find information about their health, understand that information, and then use it to make appropriate decisions about their health.

Providing information in a clear and accessible way is key for supporting all levels of Health Literacy.



What does having ‘good’ Health Literacy mean?

- That you understand or are learning about your condition
- That you can better self-manage your pain
- That you feel confident in making decisions with your clinician about your pain treatment

Your levels of **Health Literacy** can vary over time, depending on your experiences with illnesses and healthcare settings.

The **‘Ask Me 3®’** approach can help you better understand information that you get from your clinician or in a healthcare setting.

Simply ask...

- What is my main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

What can you do **before a visit to your clinician**?

- Think about what you might like to ask the clinician
- Talk to a friend or family member about the visit, or maybe bring them along
- Ask yourself what your main problem is and what can you do to help yourself

What can you do **during the visit**?

- Remember that you have a right to ask questions
- If you do not understand something, ask for it to be explained in another way
- Do not feel embarrassed about asking questions – it is the clinician’s responsibility to help you understand

‘Being educated on how to educate yourself is a lifesaver’

Patients’ feedback when clinicians use ‘Health Literacy’ approaches

‘My doctor and I actually sit down and talk about me. I ask questions... I’ve learnt so much’

‘Clear Communication is key in Health Literacy’

Health Literacy information for the public

Health Literacy

is a person’s ability to find information about their health, understand that information, and then use it to make appropriate decisions about their health.

Providing information in a clear and accessible way is key for supporting all levels of Health Literacy.

People with low HEALTH LITERACY:

HEALTHCARE

- Have difficulty managing medications
- Spend more time in hospitals
- Are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines

PERSONAL

- Lack confidence in managing their health

HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Have less knowledge about their condition
- Have difficulty managing their symptoms
- Have poorer quality of life

Why is Health Literacy **a public health concern**?

A recent European study found that in most countries a **majority of people had low levels of health literacy**

Older people, those with lower levels of education and lower socioeconomic groups are affected most.

If you have difficulty understanding health information, use these three questions (**Ask Me Three**)

- What is my main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

ASK QUESTIONS

Asking questions is not always easy, but it is an important part of your healthcare to get the information you need to take care of yourself.

REPEAT THE INFORMATION

By repeating what you understand the information to be, your clinician can confirm that you are correct, or help you better understand what they mean.

TAKE A RELIABLE FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND WHO YOU TRUST TO HELP YOU REMEMBER AND UNDERSTAND YOUR HEALTHCARE INFORMATION.

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‘Plain Talking’ Campaign

Health Literacy Factsheet

Health Literacy Factsheet

‘Clear Communication is key in Health Literacy’

Introduction

It is well-established that self-management is key to treat pain conditions[1] which require patients to be actively involved with their treatment plans. In recent years, health services increasingly recognise the importance of patient education for treating pain[2]. However, a barrier to patient education is limited Health Literacy[3] (HL), which has been found to impact on disease related knowledge[4] – a vital component for developing effective self management skills[5].

What is Health Literacy

Health literacy is ‘The individual’s capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions’[6]. Limited HL results in poorer health outcomes for those with chronic diseases; worse symptom control, an increase in healthcare utilisation, lower adherence to treatment and inadequate communication between the patient and clinician[4].

A survey conducted across nine EU member states found worrying results in that 47% of respondents had limited HL[7], with certain populations (e.g., older people, those with lower social status and education) more likely to be affected. A number of studies have found similar levels of limited HL in people living with chronic pain[8,9,10].

Furthermore, the economic consequences of limited HL are significant; medical errors, increased illness and disability, loss of wages and compromised public health[11]. It has been estimated that low HL may account for 3–5% of total healthcare costs at health system levels[12]. These findings have led the World Health Organisation declare HL a global health concern and state that efforts to raise HL will be vital in realising the social and economic ambitions described in their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[13].

Assessing Health Literacy

A number of validated questionnaires have been developed to establish levels of HL in individuals; the Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults[14] (TOFHLA) and the Newest Vital Sign[15] (NVS). In addition, Morris and colleagues[16] devised the Single Item Literacy Screener (SILS), which may help healthcare professionals gauge levels of HL in their patients. The question asks:

‘How often do you need to have someone help you when you read instructions, pamphlets, or other written material from your doctor or pharmacy?’

Patients rate their response on a 1-5 scale: 1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Often, and 5-Always. Scores greater than 2 indicate difficulty with reading printed health related material.

Whilst questionnaires and scales offer a method to potentially identify limited HL, healthcare professionals must assume that all patients, regardless of their educational or socioeconomic background may struggle to understand and absorb health-related information. Health services also have a role in supporting patients to separate evidence-based information from false or misleading information, to provide new information that is accessible, and to deliver it at a pace that suits the patient[17]. This will ultimately allow patients to make informed decisions and become actively engaged in their own healthcare.

Health Literacy Interventions

To support patient education (verbal or written information) HL-sensitive approaches should be implemented by all healthcare professionals to enable patients develop and improve their levels of HL18. The following tools can be successfully integrated into everyday clinical practice:

Plain Language:
Use lay language and explain complex medical terminology when it is used. Provide written information in a style that is accessible to all, by considering the average reading level in your country, the language used, and the design of the leaflet[19]. Diagrams can also help explain. Readable.com is a useful online website to gauge reading level difficulty[20].

Teach Back Method:
Ask your patients to repeat back what you have said to them in their own words[21]. This allows you to gauge your patient's understanding of the information you have given them.

Ask Me 3®:
Empower your patients by encouraging them to ask these three questions during all healthcare consultations[22]:
What is my main problem?
What do I need to do?
Why is important for me to do this?

Benefits of Addressing Health Literacy

Recent studies have demonstrated that implementing the Teach Back Method and Plain English strategies lead to greater improvements in treatment adherence[23], and increased engagement in self-management practices and disease-related knowledge[24], regardless of prior HL levels. Similarly, Ask Me 3® encourages patients to be more engaged while attending physiotherapy sessions[25].

Conclusions

Limited HL is a global health issue with social and economical implications. Increasing HL-sensitive interventions in existing health services has the potential to improve health outcome for those living with pain. Health services need to consider their role in, and develop strategies for improving the public's levels of HL and accessibility to evidence-based health information.

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MAKES A DIFFERENCE...

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The Plain Talking campaign wants to improve awareness about Health Literacy

To learn more please visit our website and follow our
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