

Improving Health Literacy in Minnesota

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines health literacy as “The capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

A number of studies link limited health literacy (LHL) to poor health outcomes, including higher hospitalization rates and emergency department utilization, and poorer disease outcomes for conditions such as HIV, diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disease.

Research shows also that LHL disproportionately affects the elderly, the uninsured, those with lower levels of education, people from some racial minorities, and those for whom English is not their native language.

The Institute of Education Sciences [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#) (NAAL) survey reported that:

- Seventy-one percent of adults older than age 60 have difficulty using printed health materials.
- White respondents had better health literacy survey scores than other ethnic or racial groups. Only



nine percent of white respondents scored at the lowest level of health literacy. But 41 percent of Hispanics, 25 percent of American Indians and Native Alaskans, 24 percent of Blacks, and 13 percent of Asian respondents scored at the lowest level.

- Adults living below the poverty level have lower average health literacy than adults living above the poverty threshold. In adults who receive Medicaid, 30 percent scored at the lowest level of health literacy.
- Forty-two percent of people with chronic mental and/or physical

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health conditions scored at the lowest level of health literacy.

October is Health Literacy Month. Providers need to work on ways to ensure effective communication. Helen Osborne M.Ed., OTR/L, and founder of [Health Literacy Month](#), described why improving health literacy is so important:

“So much of using health care involves self-care, and doing those things that are recommended for us. Limited health literacy—struggling to understand those recommendations—makes understanding every part of that care hard,” said Osborne. “People are given a medication, an instruction, or a procedure preparation, and they need to do it 100 percent correctly 100 percent of the time. That 100 percent is really our goal as providers.”

Osborne said that testing or screening patients to determine health literacy levels may have a negative effect on forming a relationship that fosters understanding and effective communication. Getting to know a

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patient and what matters to them will help providers learn the best ways to understand information related to their health.

“Providers should have a variety of ways of teaching,” said Osborne. “It can be with printed word, with spoken instructions, but there also may be pictures or illustrations, or things to color on or models to work with.” Osborne recommended also comparing an unfamiliar concept to one a patient is familiar with, and making it clear what’s alike and what’s different between them.

Using teach-back technique is essential to confirm that the patient understands. Osborne recommends making it as specific as possible. “We talked about eating high-fiber foods. ‘When you go to the grocery store next

time and you look for cereals, what will you be looking for on the label?’ If they don’t understand, explain it again in a different way.”

In certain situations, patients may choose to obtain and process less information than providers are prepared to give. Osborne suggested giving those patients ways to learn more later, on their own.

“Those of us working in health care, I think often we assume that patients want to know everything all the time, and maybe they don’t,” said Osborne. “An analogy might be, if something is wrong with my car, I don’t need to know about the inner workings of this and that, just fix it, or tell me what’s needed to fix it or whether I should fix it or not.”

Health Literacy Resources

[The Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership](#)

The Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership has developed and located a variety of free resources to help educate individuals and health care professionals about the importance of health literacy:

- [HeLP MN Seniors](#)
- [Presentations and Trainings](#)
- [Papers and Articles](#)
- [Teach-back program materials](#)

[AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#)

The AHRQ’s Universal Precautions Toolkit offers primary care practices a way to assess their services for health literacy considerations.

[Health Literacy: Past, Present, and Future - IOM Workshop Summary](#)

Assess progress made in the field of health literacy, the current state of the field, and the future of health literacy at local, national, and international levels.

CLINICAL CORNER



Preventive Care Utilization Among the Uninsured by Race/Ethnicity and Income

A study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine showed uninsured adults received preventive services far below Healthy People 2020 targets. However, uninsured African-American and Hispanic populations fare better than uninsured whites in preventive service utilization.

Among the uninsured, African Americans had higher odds of receiving Pap tests, mammograms, routine physical checkups, and blood pressure checks according

to guidelines than uninsured whites. Moreover, compared to whites, uninsured Hispanics had higher odds of receiving Pap tests, mammograms, influenza vaccinations, and routine physical checkups, and lower odds of receiving blood pressure screening and advice to quit smoking. When results were stratified by household income, racial/ethnic differences persisted except for the highest income levels ($\geq 400\%$ Federal Poverty Level), where they were largely non-significant.

[Download the study >>](#)

NEWS AND RESOURCES

CMS Releases Plan to Address Health Equity in Medicare

(Source: Nurse.com)



The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Office of Minority Health unveiled the first CMS plan to address health equity in Medicare.

The CMS Equity Plan for Improving Quality in Medicare is an action-oriented plan that focuses on six priority areas and aims to reduce health disparities in four years. The plan was released at the Medicare & Medicaid At 50: Their Past, Present, and Future Impact on Health Equity conference September 8, 2015. This conference was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid and the 30th anniversary of the 1985 Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health, also known as the Heckler Report.

The equity plan focuses on Medicare populations that experience disproportionately high burdens of disease, lower quality of care, and barriers to accessing care. These populations include racial and ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, persons with disabilities, and individuals living in rural areas.

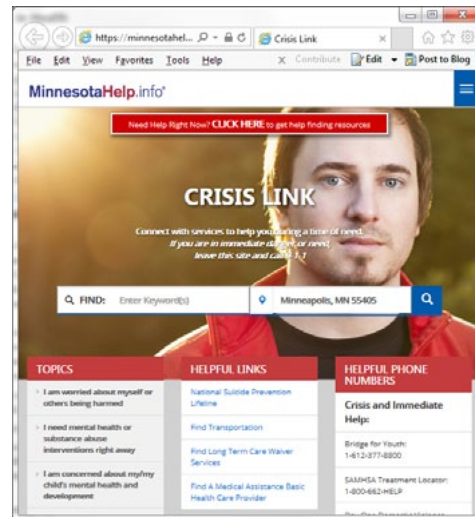
[Download the Plan >>](#)

HPOE Publishes Six Diversity in Health Care Case Studies

Health care systems are focusing on providing care that addresses the diversity of their patient populations. Health care systems also are working to increase the diversity of their staff and building a culture of diversity and

inclusion. This Hospitals in Pursuit of Excellence (HPOE) collection of case studies from the field highlights diversity initiatives at six organizations across the country. [More >>](#)

Minnesota Crisis Link Website Now Available



MinnesotaHelp.info, the State of Minnesota's online resource of helping agencies, has launched a Crisis Link website to connect people in crisis, including mental health and substance abuse, to services.

The Crisis Link website is an important online resource for finding services for people in mental health crisis. Additional resources include:

- ♦ Crisis phone lines by county, available to the public
- ♦ Help getting meals or food
- ♦ Psychiatric Assistance Line, or PAL, a child and adolescent psychiatric consultation service for physicians
- ♦ Assistance finding emergency housing

The website identifies services by the location of the searcher and includes a live chat service. [More >>](#)

Study Highlights the Black-White Sleep Gap

(Source: National Journal)



The five-year study emphasized that African-Americans, as a group, are getting the least amount of sleep—a potential causal factor in health disparities—compared to the white, Hispanic and Asian study participants. Whites in the study slept almost seven hours; African-Americans slept a little over six hours.

Compared with white participants in the study, African-American participants were five times more likely to get short sleep, defined as less than six hours a night. African-Americans also were more likely to report feeling sleepy in the daytime, and they woke up more often in the middle of the night. “Notably,” the study reads, “these associations remained evident after adjustment for sex, age, study site, and body mass index.”

Study researchers posed the question as to whether or not increasing sleep might help prevent the chronic health problems like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease that disproportionately affect African-Americans. [More >>](#)

EVENTS

Exploring East African Mental Health Issues

Tuesday, November 3, 2015

Two presentations on mental illness will be offered at the next meeting of the Metro Refugee Health Task Force, 9-11 a.m., at Sabathani Community Center, Conference Room D, 310 East 38th St., Minneapolis.

The first presentation by Hennepin County Sheriff Richard Stanek is on mental illness in jail and prison. The second features Yussuf Shafie, executive director of the Alliance Wellness Center, on understanding East African clients and mental health. For more information, call 651-201-5414.

Safe Mothers, Safe Newborns Conference — Somali Maternal/Newborn Health

Thursday, November 12, 2015

Learn more about maternal and newborn health in Somali families. Sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and Isuroon, a Minneapolis-based organization that advocates for empowerment, education, equal opportunity and health care for Somali women living outside of Somalia. [More >>](#)

Cultural Psychiatry: Exploring Intersections and Building Bridges

Friday, November 13, 2015

Learn how cultural differences may

impact diagnosis of certain psychiatric diagnosis, and have implications for treatment planning, and, subsequently, adherence and effectiveness. [More >>](#)

MN Lions World Diabetes Day at Walmart

Saturday, November 14, 2015

The MN Lions Diabetes Foundation and their sponsoring partners are hosting World Diabetes Day at Minnesota Walmart Stores in Bemidji, Brooklyn Center, Dilworth, Duluth, Mankato, Marshall, North Rochester, and Sartell. Families and individuals will have an opportunity to participate in fun food and exercise demonstrations, a kid's zone, educational activities, and receive resource information. [More >>](#)

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Stratis Health works toward its mission through initiatives funded by federal and state government contracts, and community and foundation grants, including serving as Minnesota's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization.

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