



Check your practice: Health literacy in the Patient's Medical Home

Best Advice Guide: Quick Reference

Health literacy is a challenge for 60% of the general population in Canada and for 88% of seniors. The inability to understand relevant health information can have huge health consequences.

Addressing health literacy helps patients understand the complex medical language used in their interactions with the health care system. Helping patients understand this information improves care by making it easier for them to plan medication and treatment.

A family practice that is aware of health literacy challenges can mitigate their consequences. Small changes in the way practices communicate with patients—verbally, in written material, and in the office environment—can go a long way.



Consider the following tips for your practice:



Enhance physician communication skills (both verbal and written): Use plain language in all verbal and written interactions with patients and families to lower the chance of miscommunication and help patients understand the information given to them. **Start with the AHRQ Health Literacy Precautions Toolkit.**



Increase health literacy assessment awareness: Apply simple health literacy assessment tools in patient and family interactions to screen for literacy challenges and eliminate assumptions about patient understanding.



Adapt and use health literacy models to bridge the gap between health information and patient understanding: Use health literacy tools that are most appropriate for your practice community to minimize mistakes that result from misunderstanding health information communicated to patients and families.

- **Examples:** Visual aids, decision tools, or check-in methods such as the “Teach back” technique.



Provide culturally appropriate resources to match patient and family literacy needs: Know the surrounding community and provide resources tailored to its needs, through translation services, specific social/community supports, etc.



Evaluate: Use patient surveys to evaluate how your practice is doing, and adapt your literacy strategies based on what you learn.



Work upstream: Use your practice experience to contribute to teaching about health literacy strategies in education and continuing professional development programs, as well as within the health care system as a whole.



For more information on clinical, community, and population-level strategies to tackle health literacy challenges in the **Patient's Medical Home**, and for details on resources available to you, please refer to **Best Advice: Health Literacy**.

<http://patientsmedicalhome.ca/>

<http://patientsmedicalhome.ca/resources/best-advice-guide-health-literacy-patients-medical-home/>