



# 2018 Midwest Stream Forum for Agricultural Worker Health

September 10th – 12th, 2018

Prescription:

# Health Literacy: A Prescription for Better Health and Health Care for Rural Residents



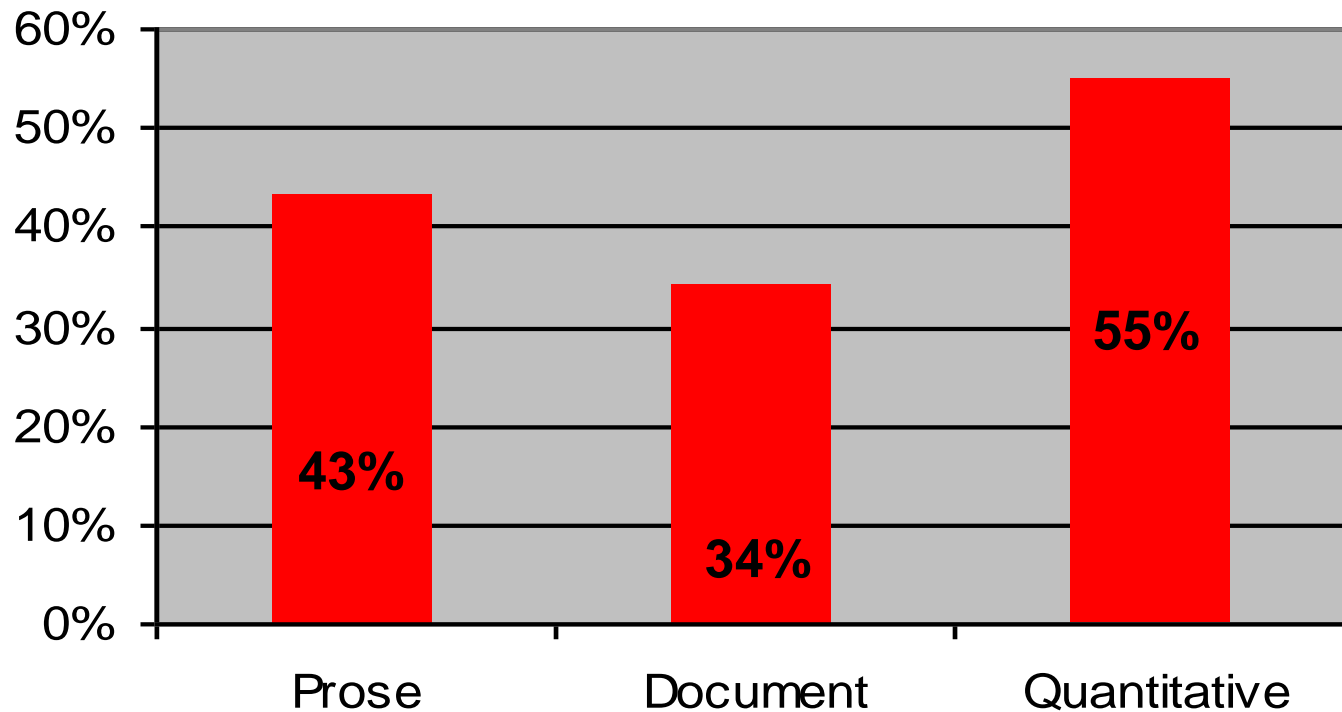
Steven Sparks. MS  
Health Literacy Director

# Literacy Levels

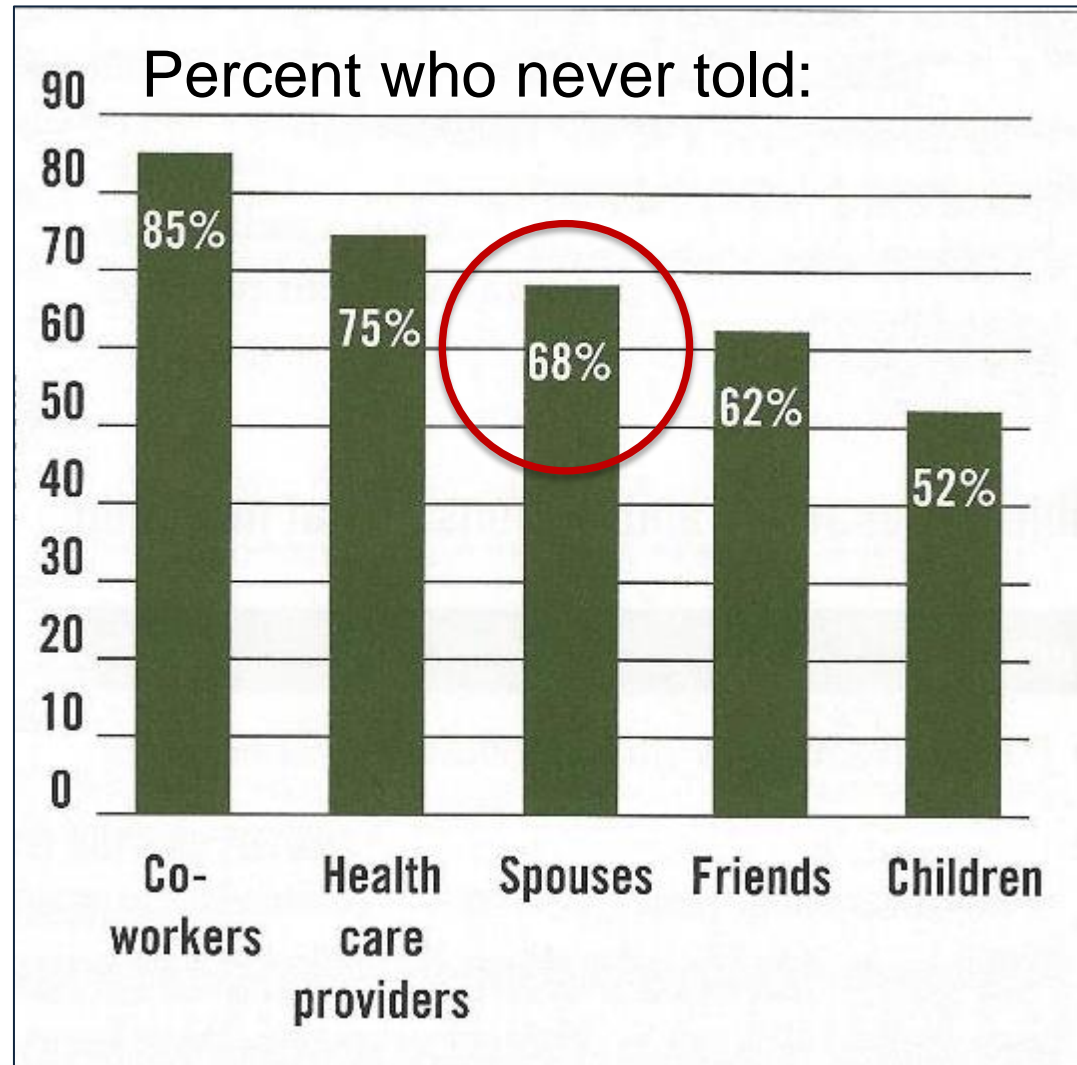
- **Below Basic** — no more than the most simple & concrete literacy skills
- **Basic** — skills needed to perform simple, everyday literacy activities
- **Intermediate** — skills needed to perform moderately challenging activities
- **Proficient** — skills needed for more complex & challenging literacy activities

# Adult Literacy Levels

34-55% of adults are at below basic and basic literacy levels



# A silent problem



Parikh, N.S., et al.  
Patient Educ Couns, 1996

# What is Health Literacy?

“The degree to which an individual has the capacity to **obtain, communicate, process,** and **understand** basic health information and services to **make appropriate health decisions.**”

-The Affordable Care Act of 2010

# Health Literacy means a person is able to understand:

- Instructions on prescription bottles
- Appointment slips
- Medical brochures, provider instructions and consent forms
- Complex health care systems
- Insurance benefits

# Health literacy affected by

1. Literacy skills of patient
2. Communication skills of the provider
3. Demands placed on the patient

# Demands of medications

Persons with limited health literacy are less likely to take medications effectively:

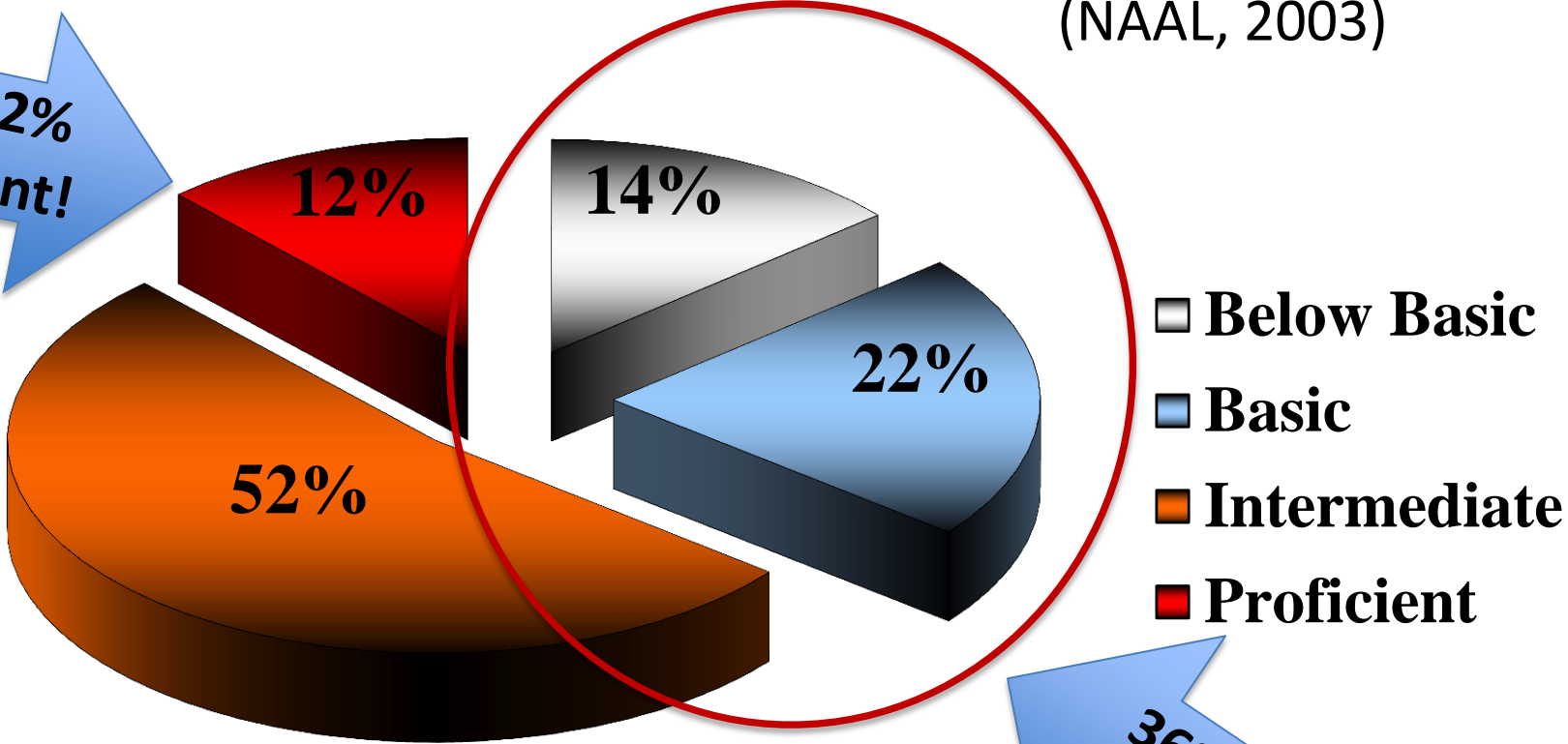
- Adherence: 20% greater risk of hospital readmission
- 46% of all literacy levels misunderstood one or more dosage instructions





# Health literacy of U.S. Adults

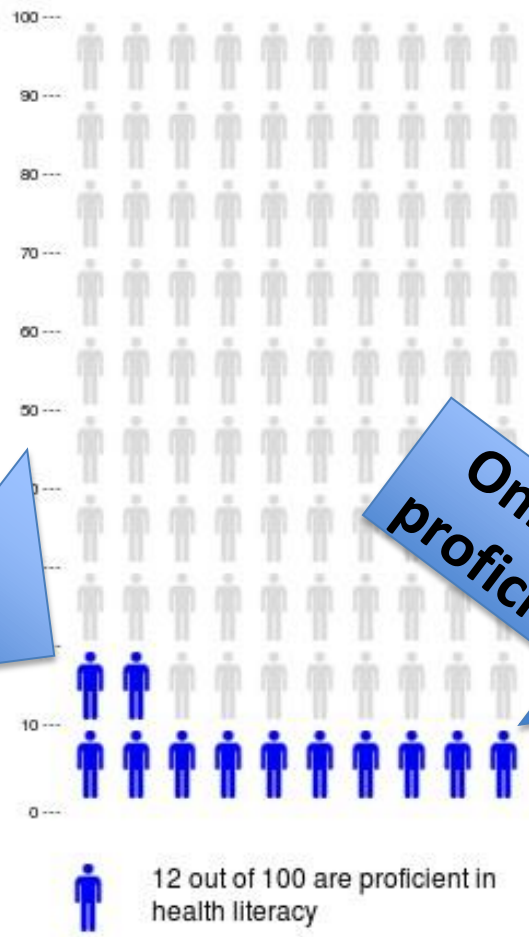
(NAAL, 2003)



Only 12% proficient!

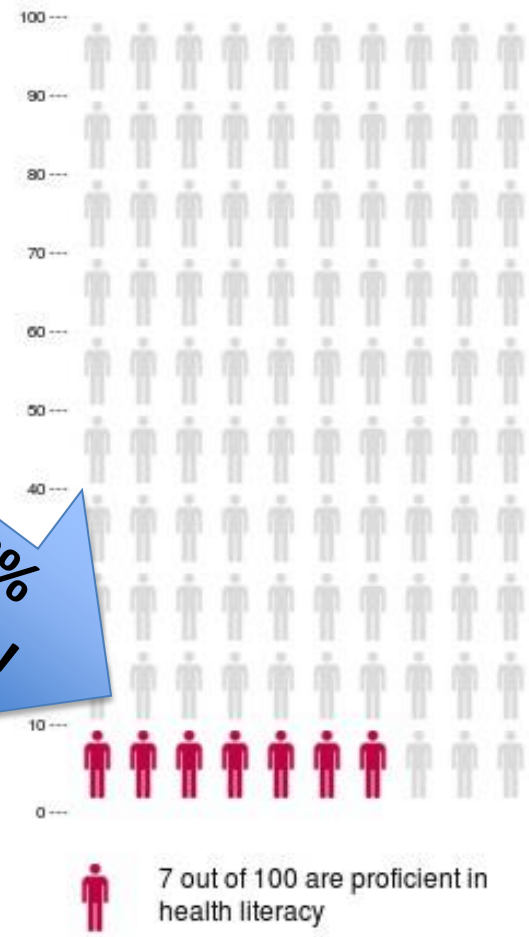
36% struggle with low health literacy

# Adults proficient in health literacy



Only 12% proficient!

Only 8% proficient!



All Adults

Rural Adults

# You can't tell by looking...

- 2013 study:
  - **63%**: patients with high likelihood of limited health literacy
  - **19%** estimated by nurses

Nurse Overestimation of Patient Health Literacy,  
Journal of Health Communication, 2013 (18)

# Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

- **Poor health status**
  - Poor: 68%
- **Low education level**
  - Some HS/less than HS Grad: 76%
- **Insurance**
  - Those on Medicaid: 57%

# Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

## Ethnicity:

- Entire population 36%
- White 28%
- Native Americans 48%
- Blacks 58%
- Hispanics 66%

# Who is most at risk for low health literacy?

- **Seniors**
  - Seniors 65+: 59%
  - Seniors 75+: 70%
- **Persons with Disabilities**
  - Persons with physical/other disabilities - 49%

# Rural: Greater concentration of low health literacy

More people with characteristics typically associated with low health literacy:

- Poverty
- Age
- Education
- Inadequate/lack of health insurance
- Absence of usual sources of care

Health Literacy and Urbanicity, Halverson et. al, 2013


# The challenge of finding health information in rural areas

- Lack of public transit
- Geographic isolation
- Reduced access to health care providers
- Hesitancy to question provider



# The rural solution

- Public Health
- Self-reliance
- Dependence on pharmacists, nurses, school nurses
- Churches
- Libraries
- The Internet.....but.....



“I’ll take care of it myself.”

# Internet not always a good option for rural residents

- Internet less reliable
- Options very confusing
- Low literacy reduces internet use



# Implications of Low Health Literacy

**How health literacy affects  
what you do every day**

# Implications: Use of Preventive Services

Persons with limited health literacy skills are more likely to skip preventive measures such as:

- Mammograms
- Pap smears
- Flu shots

# Implications: Chronic Conditions

Persons with limited health literacy skills:

- More likely to have chronic conditions and less likely to manage them effectively
- Less knowledge of their illness
- Diabetes: greater risk of death
- Cancer:
  - Later stages of diagnosis
  - Obtain less information from materials

# Implications: Hospitalization and Health Status

Persons with limited health literacy skills:

- More preventable hospital visits and admissions.
- More ED visits
- Significantly more likely to report their health as “poor.”

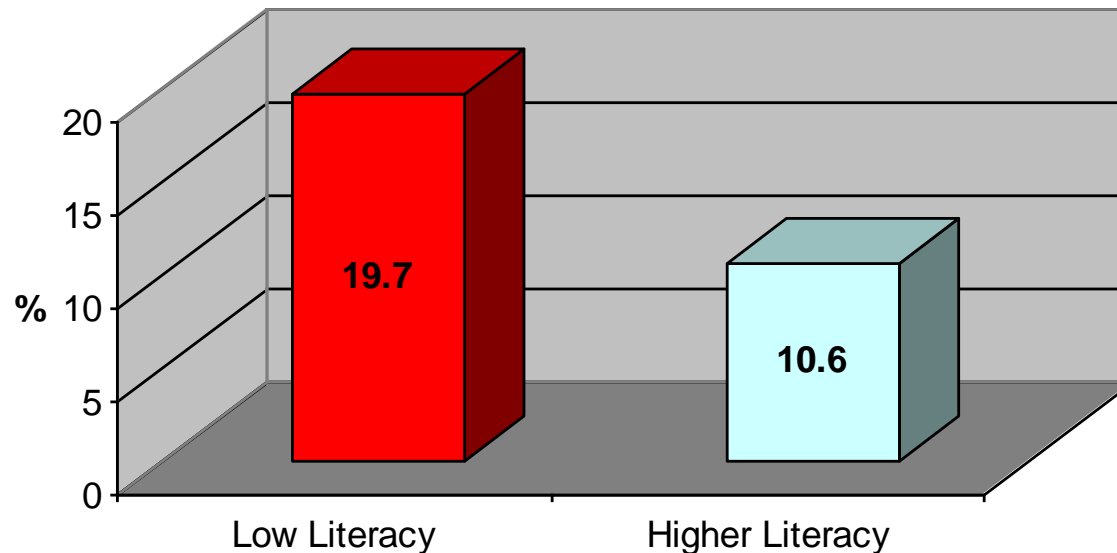
# Implications: Mortality

Persons with limited health literacy skills:

- Are more likely to die earlier

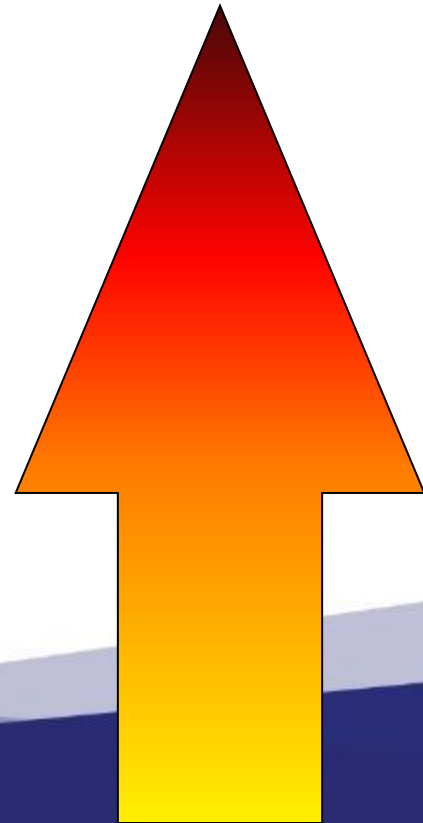
Risk of Death

Hazard ratio: 1.75



# Implications: Health Care Costs

**Low health literacy increases US health care costs by \$50-\$73 billion annually.\***

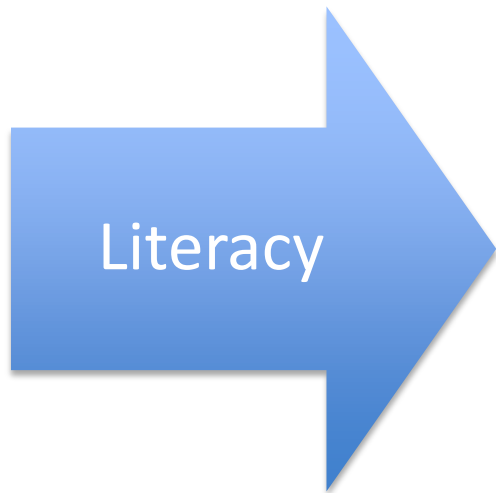


\*National Academy on an Aging Society



# Clues to low health literacy

- Incomplete forms
- Missed appointments
- Noncompliance with medications
- Inability to explain medication purpose
- Overstating how well they are doing
- Excuses: “I forgot my glasses”

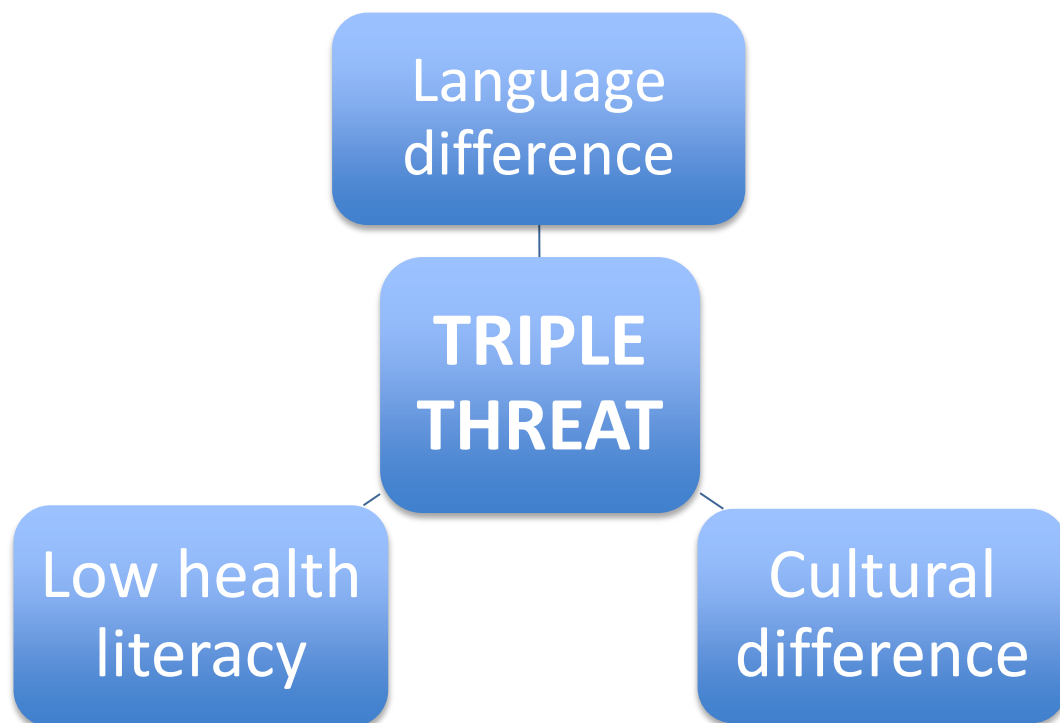


Vs.



- Almost everyone will have difficulty with health literacy at some point.
- Much harder for those that do not:
  - Read very well.
  - Speak English as their primary language.

# The triple threat to effective health communication



P. Schyve. J Gen Intern Med.  
Nov. 2007; 22: 360-361

**You may be thinking.....**



**Most  
importantly**

# Adopt Universal Precautions

Since you can't always tell by looking....

- Take actions that minimize risk for everyone
- Use plain language with everyone





# 8 Steps to Better Communication

# 1

## Create Shame-Free Environment



Even highly educated people prefer simple, understandable health information.

# 2

## Practice plain, simple language

20% of American adults read at or below the **5th grade** level.

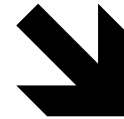


Most health care materials are written above the **10th grade** level.



# Use Plain Language

**Prevents osteoporosis**



**Keeps bones strong**

# Plain language resources

[www.JustPlainClear.com](http://www.JustPlainClear.com)



Search by Word:

Submit



[How to search](#)

Just Plain Clear®

Search by Letter:

A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

T

U

V

W



X

Y

Z

0-9

## Search results: case management

Term	Definition	Translations	Share
case management			
case management	A service to help patients get the health care they need	 en español: administración de casos	

# Use Short Words & Sentences

- Return in one week.
- Bring your insurance card with you.
- Please sign in.
- Take this form to your boss tomorrow.
- Pay your premium by next Friday.
- Drink plenty of orange juice.

# Use one-idea sentences

## Sentences with one idea

**No:** Help may be available for you to pay your medical bills and to find out if you qualify, here's what you should do.

**Yes:** We may be able to help you pay your medical bills. Find out if you qualify. Follow these steps.

# Use active voice

Passive: You will be asked to give information about your medical history.

Active: We will ask for information about your medical history.

## Avoid:

It shall be signed

You will be notified

## Use:

You must sign

We will notify you

# Use concrete language (say what you mean)

Exercise regularly

Don't lift anything heavy

Get adequate rest

Exercise 3-5 days per  
week for 40 minutes

Don't lift anything over 10  
pounds.

Get at least 7 hours/night



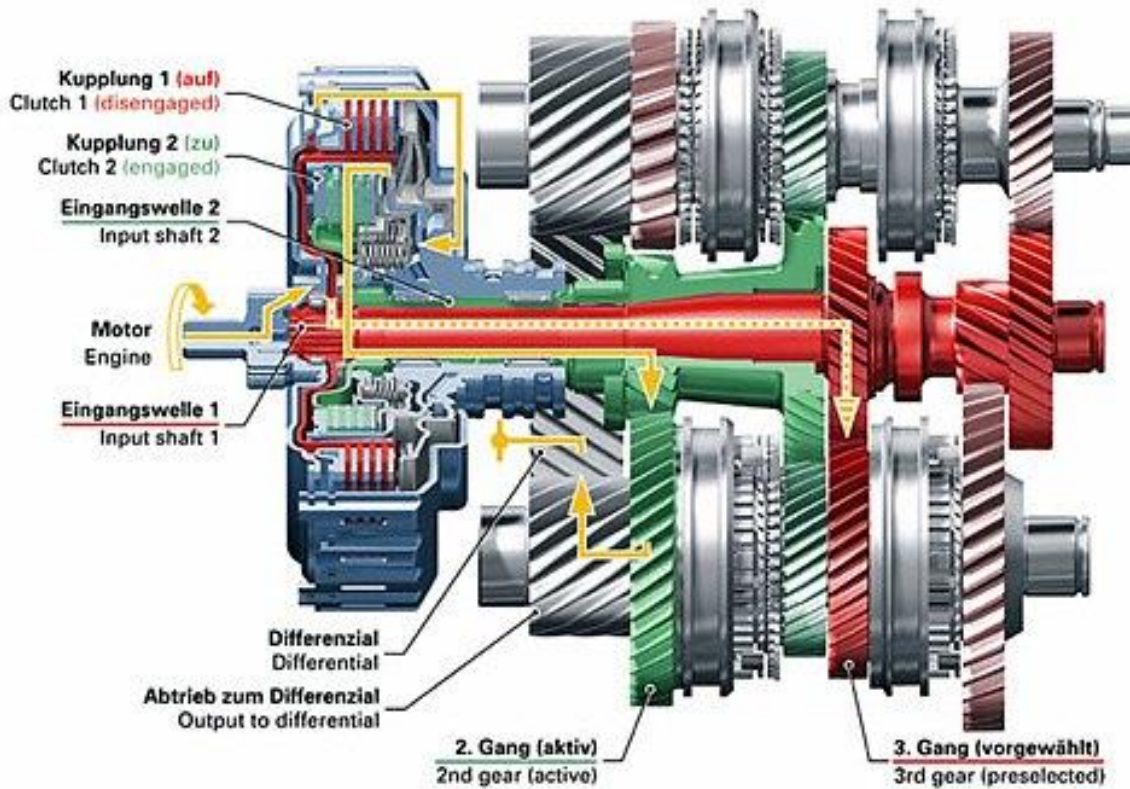
## Slow down

Speak clearly and at a moderate pace.

sorrymyemaillookslikethisbutmycomputerdroppedandmyspacebarbroke

# 4

# Organize for understanding



Only “need to know” concepts



# Chunking

- Break up material into manageable chunks
- Limit to 5 pieces of information at a time; 3 even better

# Before....

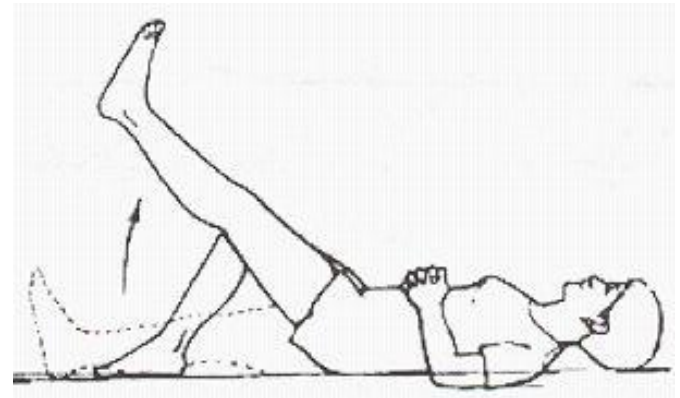
## Straight Leg Raise

Lying on your back, bend your opposite knee straight and slowly lift your other leg up approximately 12 in, hold for 3s, and lower slowly.

# After....

## Straight Leg Raise


- Lie on your back
- Bend left leg
- Lift right leg 12 inches
- Hold for 3 seconds
- Lower slowly



Literacy and the Older Adult, from Topics in Geriatric Rehabilitation, Oct-Dec2005, Vol. 21 Issue 4, p275

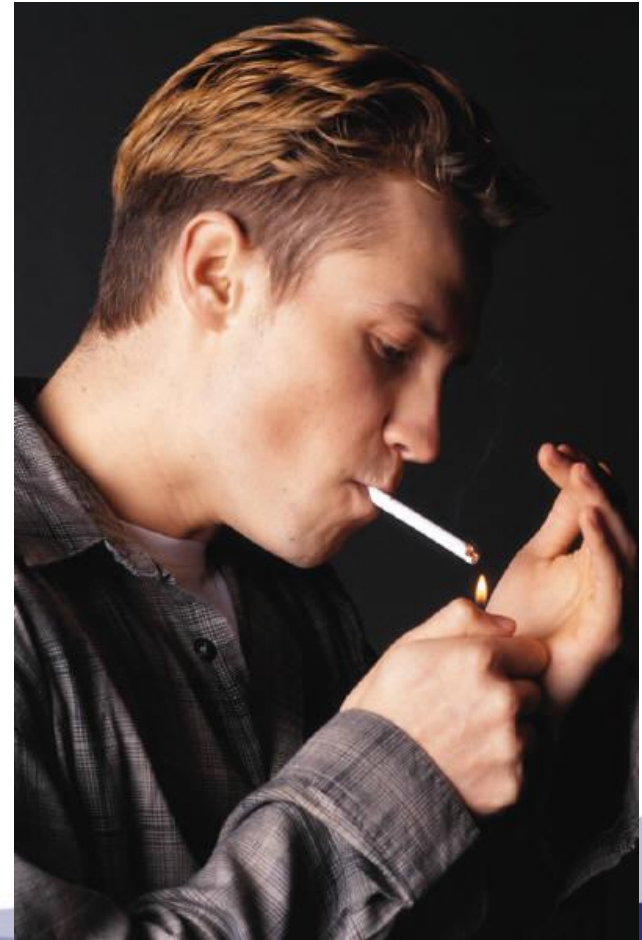
# 5

## Show or draw pictures

<p><b>Fever</b></p> 	<p><b>Chills</b></p> 	<p><b>Body aches</b></p> 
<p><b>Cough</b></p> 	<p><b>Sleepy</b></p> 	<p><b>Headache</b></p> 
<p><b>Sore throat</b></p> 	<p><b>Runny nose</b></p> 	<p><b>Sneeze</b></p> 

# Relevant pictures

Which would be best to illustrate a stop smoking message?



# 6

## Help with numbers

### Pop Quiz on Numeracy

1. A person taking Drug A has a 1% chance of having an allergic reaction. If 1,000 people take Drug A, how many would you expect to have an allergic reaction?  
**Answer: 10**
2. A person taking Drug B has a 1 in 1,000 chance of an allergic reaction. What percent of people taking Drug B will have an allergic reaction?  
**Answer: 0.1%**



# Help with numbers

- Less is more—only relevant information
- Reduce need for calculations
- Pictographs, diagrams, charts
- Frequency, not percent
- Familiar objects as analogies



# 7

## Verify understanding using “Teach Back”

- Asking people to repeat **in their own words** what they need to know or do, in a non-shaming way.
- **NOT** a test of the person, but of how well *you* explained a concept.
- A chance to check for understanding and, if necessary, re-teach the information.



# Using Teach Back...

- Ask to **demonstrate** understanding

“We have gone over a lot of information today. What will you tell your boss about your health condition?”

“I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Please tell me how can you avoid losing your health insurance.”

- Do not ask: “Do you understand?”

# Teach Back Tips

- Start slowly – once a day?
- Plan and practice your approach
- Use handouts

**Once you get used to Teach-Back, it doesn't take any more time.**



# Ask the right questions

- Is there something else you want to address in the visit today?
- Is there anything else you want to address in the visit today?

Reducing patients' unmet concerns in primary care: The difference one word can make. Heritage j, et al. J Gen Int Med 2007;22;1429-1433.

# Encouraging questions

- “What questions do you have?”
- “Tell me your questions.”

# If you only remember three things:

1. Practice plain language
2. Slow down
3. Teach back-confirm understanding

(3 Best Practices: DeWalt et al, 2010)



# What Questions Do You Have?

**Steve Sparks**  
**Health Literacy Director**  
**[steve@wisconsinliteracy.org](mailto:steve@wisconsinliteracy.org)**