

Health Literacy Workshop for NHS Borders

Aim of Session (75 minutes long)

- **To increase knowledge about health literacy**
- **To understand its relevance to their role and the service**
- **To identify what can be done to improve the health literacy of those using the service**

1. Ice Breaker

Give everyone a sheet of paper. Tell people to close their eyes and listen to your directions as laid out below –

- Hold the paper in both hands
- Fold the paper in half
- Tear off the lower left-hand side of the paper
- Fold it in half again
- Tear off the upper right-hand side of the paper
- Fold it in half again
- Tear off the lower right-hand side of the paper
- Now open your eyes

Inevitably everyone's paper will look different. It shows us that despite everyone hearing the same instructions we all understood or interpreted them slightly differently. I thought I had communicated the instructions very clearly, but obviously not!

So how is this relevant to health literacy.....

2. What is health literacy?

- Show intro and section one of Making it Easy DVD.
- Explain that health literacy is, 'the ability to access, understand and use information for health'. Crucially it is not just the ability to read, it requires a complex group of reading, listening, analytical and decision-making skills, and the ability to apply these skills to health situations. e.g. in discussions with GP, practice nurse or pharmacist. It is crucial in self-management, informed decision making and consent.

- Explain that health literacy is a critical component of communication, and that The Patients Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 sets out in law that the key Healthcare Principles states ‘ Communication – patients should be communicated with in a way that they can understand and healthcare staff should make sure that the patient has understood the information given.’

3. What is the impact of low health literacy?

Brainstorm (in small groups or in a large group) ‘what is the impact of low health literacy on your patients?’ If in small groups feedback to large group and discuss

Facilitator checklist - People with low health literacy are more likely to have:

- poorer health status and poorer self reported health
- enter the health system when sicker
- are at a greater risk of hospitalisation and have longer hospital visits
- have higher rates of admission to emergency services and require more avoidable hospitalisation
- are less likely to adhere to prescribed treatments and self care plans
- have more medication and treatment errors
- have less knowledge of disease management and health-promoting behaviours
- have decreased ability to communicate with healthcare professionals and share in decision-making
- are less able to make appropriate health decisions
- make less use of preventive services
- suffer stigma and shame

4. Show section two of Making it Easy – impact of low health literacy

5. Who has low health literacy?

Although health literacy problems can affect all population groups, which groups do you think it is more prevalent in and why? Brainstorm in small groups or in a large group. If in small groups feedback to large group and discuss.

Facilitator checklist - Although low health literacy skills can affect all population groups, it is more prevalent amongst:

- older people (slower in processing new information & understanding metric measures)
- black and ethnic minority communities (language & cultural differences)
- people with long term conditions or disabilities (complex medical & treatment regimes)
- lower socio-economic communities (more likely to have low literacy levels)

Within Scotland findings from the recent Scottish Survey into Adult Literacies (2009) found that 26.7% of the population faced occasional challenges with their literacy skills and 3.6% faced serious challenges, with people living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland having the lowest scores.

5. Show the first section of the DVD, **Managing Your Medicines**, this is a true story and illustrates the impact of low health literacy on health (omit this if not enough time).

6. Reading/Writing/Filling in Forms

There is an expectation in the NHS that patients will have a high level of reading and writing skills.

See Hospital Appointment Letter and Form, any comments?

Back page, Changes to Ambulance Booking Line – how would you re-write this to ensure the key message is clear and understandable?

Facilitators checklist -

Good points in the example:

- Active voice is used
- Text used is arial
- Font size 14
- No sentences in capital letters

Points to be improved

- Left justification
- Use short words and sentences
- Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out
- List important points separate from the text – see the title

Give out LID handout

7. What can you and your service do to improve health literacy?

A. How are you currently improving health literacy in your work? Brainstorm in small groups or large group and feedback.

B. How can you change your practice to ensure you are always improving health literacy, brainstorm in small groups or large group and feedback.

Make the following suggestions -

- Use the '**Teach-back**' technique: check that you have explained everything in ways people understand, by asking them to explain in their own words the information you have given. Give out postcard
- **Chunk and check:** break what you need to discuss into small chunks, and check understanding using teach-back before continuing.
- **Use pictures:** draw or show a picture to help convey a complex concept or body part.
- **Use simple language:** avoid jargon and use language that is easy for the person in front of you to understand both when you speak to people and in any written information you provide.

- Literacy awareness: **routinely ask people** if they would like help in filling out forms.

8. Show section 3 of Making it Easy DVD and handout Teach-back cards and Making it Easy Quick Guides.

9. Who else in your organisation needs to hear these message – who would you prioritise and why?

Discussion