

Health literacy relates to a range of communications including written, spoken and visual.

All health and social care staff in Scotland have a responsibility to support health literacy.



What is health literacy?

Health literacy is about people having enough knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to use health information, to be active partners in their care, and to navigate health and social care systems.

(Making it Easy: A health literacy action plan for Scotland)



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This resource may be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on **0131 656 3200** or email **altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk** to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.



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Health Literacy

What is it and why is it important to me working in health and social care?



The Health Literacy Place

www.healthliteracyplace.org.uk

What we want to achieve

'We want Scotland to be a health literate society which enables all of us to have sufficient confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills to live well, on our own terms and with any health condition'.

People need staff and services to operate and communicate in a way that promotes their health literacy and assists them in being active partners in their care.



We want to support health and social care staff to build health literacy into their practice and we offer a range of tools and techniques to support this, including:

- A national website for health literacy news information and tools for practice
- Online discussions and networks via People Connect on the Knowledge Network
- Assistance in the creation and development of a network of health literacy supporters across Scotland
- Training, education and resources for health literacy supporters and others interested in the spread of health literacy messages and awareness.

We are asking you to:

- Become a local health literacy supporter to raise awareness with peers and colleagues, this will provide you with opportunities for development and to contribute to national programmes and development.
- Visit the website www.healthliteracyplace.org.uk
- Add health literacy as a subject interest to your profile on People Connect

We are offering:

- Support in becoming a health literacy supporter
- Health literacy training for you/your team
- Information on tools and techniques to support you in promoting health literacy

Why is it important?

Health literacy is essential for patient safety, self management and effective health and social care relationships with patients, families and carers.

Improving and supporting health literacy can result in:

- Improved health and health outcomes for patients
- Better patient and professional relationships
- Improved understanding of medication information, instruction and adherence
- Reduced risk of serious health problems resulting from misunderstanding and communication
- Reduced readmissions and repeat appointments
- Reduced health inequalities

Who is at risk?

There are a range of characteristics that can impact on a person's health literacy, these include education, ethnic background, language, age, illness and financial and social resources.

However, you should never make assumptions about a person's health literacy level as it is not always apparent. Everyone's health literacy can be affected at any time, for example, when receiving new or distressing information. Therefore, it is recommended that you take a universal precaution approach in your practice and follow the following approaches with everyone that you come into contact with.

The five approaches

There are five approaches that we suggest you implement as part of your standard practice to support communication and understanding. These are covered in more detail on the Health Literacy Place website and through the training sessions along with other tools and techniques.

- 1. Assume nothing** and always offer support to people, for example when filling in forms, this is called taking universal precautions. The Universal Precautions Toolkit is available on the website in the resource library.
- 2. Teach back** – check that you have explained everything in a way that has been understood, it is not the patients responsibility to understand, it is your responsibility to check that you have been understood. A range of teach back information is available in the teach back pages of the website.
- 3. Use simple language** – use language that is easy for the person in front of you to understand and avoid jargon and medical terminology. Guidance for alternative terms for medical and healthcare language can be found on the website.
- 4. Use simple pictures** – draw or show pictures to help convey a complex concept or body part, templates can be found on the website
- 5. Chunk and check** – break down the information that you need to discuss with someone into smaller chunks then check for understanding as you go. More information can be found in the Tools for Practice section of the website.

