

Improving Health Outcomes Through Health Literacy



Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Health Media and Communications Division

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Presenter

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Objectives

- Define Key Concepts of Health Literacy.
- Highlight the impact of health literacy on healthcare outcomes.
- Discuss ways to improve patient-provider communication.

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National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy

Seven components:

- Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable.
- Promote changes in the health care system that improve health information, communication, informed decision-making, and access to health services.

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Continued...

- Incorporate accurate, standards-based, and developmentally appropriate health and science information and curricula in child-care and education through the university level.
- Support and expand local efforts to provide adult education, English language instruction, and culturally and linguistically appropriate health information services in the community.

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Continued...

- Build partnerships, develop guidance, and change policies.
- Increase basic research and the development, implementation, and evaluation of practices and interventions to improve health literacy.
- Increase the dissemination and use of evidence-based health literacy practices and interventions.

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What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information to make appropriate decisions” (HRSA, n.d.).

Low health literacy is more prevalent in:

Older adults	Minority populations	People who have a low socioeconomic status	Underserved populations
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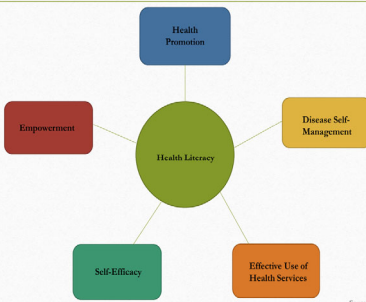
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The Importance of HL

The Importance of Health Literacy

- Complete paperwork
- Seek support
- Understand medical directions
- Navigate the health system
- Analyze the risks and benefits
- Organize health appointments
- Understand nutrition
- Builds confidence
- Understand how health insurance works

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Source: Doyle, Gaffney & Fulham, 2012

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Health
Literacy
Data

People with low health literacy are more likely to report poor health.

Low health literacy = increased negative health outcomes

Plain language is the preferred type of communication.

Low health literacy increased health care costs in the billions.

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Health Literacy in the U.S.

Level	Percentage
Intermediate	53%
Basic	22%
Proficient	12%
Below Basic	13%

77 million adults have basic or below health literacy skills – 88% are below “proficient”

Proficient: Can perform complex and challenging literacy activities
Intermediate: Can perform moderately challenging literacy activities
Basic: Can perform simple everyday literacy activities
Below Basic: Can perform no more than the most simple and concrete literacy activities

SOURCE: THE HEALTH LITERACY OF AMERICAN ADULTS. RESULTS FROM THE 2003 NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF ADULT LITERACY. NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS (2006). [HTTP://NCES.ED.GOV/NAAL/HEALTH.ASP](http://nces.ed.gov/naal/health.asp)

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Health Literacy Examples

- **Below Basic** - Being able to identify and correctly circle the date of a medical appointment on a hospital appointment slip.
- **Basic** – Can give two reasons a person with no symptoms of a specific disease should be tested for that disease based on information contained in a clearly written pamphlet.

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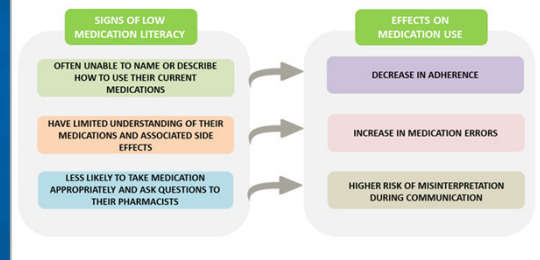
Health Literacy Examples

- **Intermediate** – Ability to accurately interpret and understand a prescription drug label.
- **Proficient** – Can calculate and employee’s share of health insurance costs for a year using a table that shows how the employee’s monthly cost varies depending on income and family size.

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Low Health Literacy

EFFECTS OF LIMITED HEALTH LITERACY



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Low Health Literacy


Red Flags for Low Literacy

- ✓ Frequently missed appointments
- ✓ Incomplete registration forms
- ✓ Non-compliance with medication
- ✓ Unable to name medications, explain purpose or dosing
- ✓ Identifies pills by looking at them, not reading label
- ✓ Unable to give coherent, sequential history
- ✓ Ask fewer questions
- ✓ Lack of follow-through on tests or referrals



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patients with low
HEALTH LITERACY...



Are more likely to visit an **EMERGENCY ROOM**

Have more **HOSPITAL STAYS**

Are less likely to follow **TREATMENT PLANS**

Have higher **MORTALITY RATES**

www.cdc.gov/phpr 

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Health Literacy Strategies

- **Plain Language**
- It is a form of clear writing that is easy to understand.
- It is “to the point” and helps improve communication.
- It saves time and money.
- It reduces barriers in communication.

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Examples of Plain Language

- Use every year instead of yearly
- Use high blood pressure instead of hypertension
- Use prevention instead of pre-exposure prophylaxis
- Use by mouth instead of oral
- Use tired instead of fatigue

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Three Ps of Health Literacy:
PLAIN, PERSONAL, POSSIBLE

PLAIN
Use plain language and simple organization

- Use a friendly and helpful tone, not clinical.
- Use concrete terms and word pictures.
- Highlight calls-to-action and key takeaways.

"A healthy artery is smooth and flexible like a rubber tube. Blood flows through it freely. An artery with atherosclerosis is more like a clogged pipe."

Think short: paragraphs, sentences, and words.

Skim and scan: use headings, subheadings, and bulleted lists.

Medical term	Plain language substitute
Carcinogen	Cancer-causing
Intravenous	Into your vein, into your blood stream
Mammogram	Breast health test
Pulmonary	Related to the lungs
Tumor	Growth, lump
Verify	Check, find out

Source: CDC National Center for Health Marketing, Plain Language Thesaurus for Health Communication, 2009.²⁰

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Recommended Strategies

- Explain things clearly and in plain language
- Use a “teach back” or “show me” technique to check understanding
- Focus on key messages and repeat
- Use patient-friendly education materials to enhance patient-provider communication.

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Recommended Strategies

- Speak at a slower pace and use fewer words
- Use analogies
- Use graphics and pictures
- Provide information on an appropriate grade level

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"Teach-Back" to Assess for Understanding

Goal: Effective child and family self-management

- Teach new concept or skill →
- ← Repeat new learning in own words or demonstrate new skill ("teach-back")
- Clarify or correct misunderstood information →
- ← Repeat corrected information
- "What questions do you have?"
- Continue process until concept or skill is understood →

Health Literacy Principles

Encourage questions	Use plain language	Limit teaching to 3-5 concepts
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© Children's Hospital of WI, 2009

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The teachback process in healthcare

- 1 Share information**
First, the expert gives information to the client, ideally using plain language.
- 2 Confirm Understanding**
The student is then asked to repeat back, using their own words, what they understood.
- 3 Rephrase or clarify**
If further explanation or clarification is required, the expert re-phrases the information in a different manner and asks the student to teach the information back again.
- 4 Continue on**
Once the expert is confident the student understands, the expert can move onto the next concept, continuing to use TeachBack as appropriate.

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Patient Communication

Patient-Centered Communication

Improved clinical outcome

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Breakdown in Communication


- A person’s ability to manage their care, emotions, and disease management is impacted by the way providers communicate.
- Miscommunication or a breakdown in communication in patient-provider relationships can lead to negative health outcomes for a patient and a health institution.

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Breakdown in Communication

- Patients value clinicians who are:
 - sensitive to their needs
 - Listen and respond carefully and appropriately
 - Meet them where they are
 - Explain things in a way that they can understand

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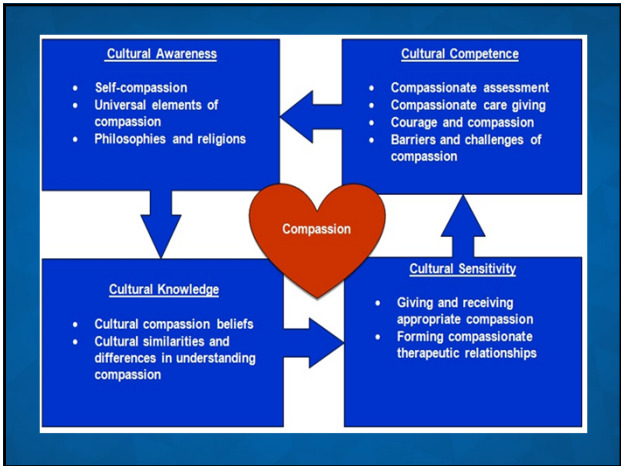
Example of Communication Breakdown	How Can PCC Help?
Patient is upset that clinician did not provide information about treatment side effects in advance, including how side effects might affect day-to-day life.	 Function: Exchanging Information When discussing the treatment plan, provide information about potential side effects, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how likely patients are to experience side effects, • why side effects occur, • how side effects may impact day-to-day life, and • ways to mitigate or manage side effects.
Patient is uncertain about the step in their care and how things will unfold during treatment.	 Function: Managing Uncertainty Provide clear and complete information about planned steps in care and what to expect at different points in care. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be explicit about any uncertainties related to treatment, such as why, when, and how plans might change. • Reassure patients you will discuss possible changes in their care right away.
Patient feels that clinician treats them like a number or "a guinea pig" and does not know or care about them as an individual.	 Function: Fostering Healing Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask patients about themselves, such as family, interests, or occupation. • Find out what is important to the patient.
Patient is overwhelmed with the cancer care plan and what they need to do.	 Function: Enabling Patient Self-Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that cancer care is complex and validate the patient's feeling of being overwhelmed. • Reassure patients you will help them navigate their care. • Help patients identify strategies to manage their care. • Help patients identify sources of support, such as family and patient navigator.
Patient feels that clinician does not try to understand or appreciate their opinion when making decisions.	 Function: Making Decisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask patients what is most important to them in making decisions, including what outcomes are most important. • Discuss factors for patients to consider with each option. • Ask for patients' opinions on the treatment options.
Patient feels like clinician is not aware of or sensitive to their distress and fears.	 Function: Recognizing and Responding to Emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask patients how they are feeling emotionally. • Be attentive to nonverbal emotional cues. • Acknowledge and validate patients' emotions.

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Health Outcomes

- Negative health consequences occur when a breakdown in communication occurs.
- This can be detrimental to a patient/client.
- Low quality health care and support staff can also lead to negative health outcomes.
- Receiving inaccurate information or having symptoms ignored can cause poor health outcomes.

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Cultural Competency

- Racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately burdened by chronic illness.
- They have higher morbidity and mortality rates with chronic illness.
- African Americans are also more likely to be limited in physical activity, usually due to neighborhood safety and access, transportation, and chronic illness.

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Cultural Competency

- As the US becomes more diverse and people live longer, the impact of chronic illness will increase.
- Access to care also contributes to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of chronic illnesses.

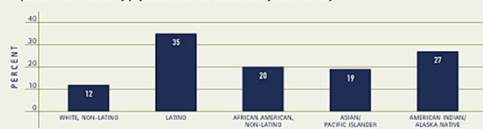
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Racial and Ethnic Minorities are Less Likely to Have a Regular Doctor and Health Insurance

FIGURE 3A
Proportion of the nonelderly population who do not have a usual source of care, by race/ethnicity



FIGURE 3B
Proportion of the nonelderly population who are uninsured, by race/ethnicity

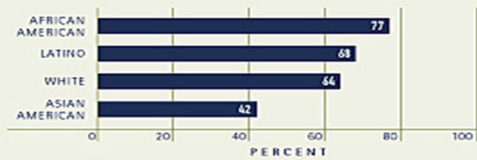


SOURCE: Little-Barton, M., Rushing, O.E., Ruiz, S. 2003. Key facts: Race, ethnicity & medical care. Washington, DC: Kaiser Family Foundation.

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Older African Americans and Latinos are More Likely to Have Chronic Conditions

FIGURE 1
Proportion of adults age 50 and older with chronic conditions,* by race/ethnicity



* Diagnosed with one of seven chronic conditions: asthma, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, or anxiety/depression.

SOURCE: Collins, K.S., Hughes, D.L., Doty, M.M., Ives, B.L., Edwards, J.N. & Tenney, K. 2002. Diverse communities, common concerns: Assessing health care quality for minority Americans. New York: The Commonwealth Fund.

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Communication Barriers

- Out of 37 million adults in the US who are bilingual, 48% of them do not speak English very well.
- Language and communication barriers can affect the quality of care received.
- Health service may also be impacted by the availability of translation services.

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Communication Barriers

- Communication barriers can also lead to poor comprehension and adherence and lower quality of care.
- Ethnic minorities tend to report less partnership with providers in medical decisions and have lower satisfaction of care.

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PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Instead of this...	Try this.
• Mentally ill	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person living with a mental health challenge or use the diagnosis if the person prefers that language (e.g., major depressive disorder)
• Crazy/insane/disturbed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person living with a mental health challenge/trauma
• Depressed/schizophrenic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person living with depression/schizophrenia
• Manic-depressive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person living with bipolar disorder
• Addict/junkie/druggie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person with a substance use challenge or disorder
• Alcoholic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person with an alcohol use challenge or disorder
• Ex-addict/clean	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Person in recovery



LANGUAGE THAT FEEDS STEREOTYPES

Instead of this...	Try this.
• Mental illness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mental health challenge or crisis
• Drug/alcohol abuse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substance use challenge or crisis
• Committed suicide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Died by suicide or lost to suicide
• Failed suicide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attempted suicide

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Low Literacy Strategies to Move Forward

- Adopt a supportive and unhurried manner to minimize patient anxiety.
- Use a health navigator or case manager to assist with communication and coordination.
- Assess the patient’s goals and make it consistent with their goals.

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Low Literacy Strategies to Move Forward

- Ensure that patient has appropriate support or assistive technology that may be needed.
- Record the health plan in the electronic health record.
- Always use the “teach back” method.
- Provide a “warm handoff” written or verbal report to the patient’s next provider or case worker.

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Implications of Low Literacy

- Research has shown that the elderly tend to have lower levels of literacy due to less formal education.
- This can also be said about racial and ethnic minorities.
- Low literacy can impact a patient’s ability to understand prescriptions or medical instructions, health educational materials, insurance/patient forms, and how to advocate for themselves.

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Implications of Low Literacy

- Low literacy skills burden the healthcare system financially which only creates a larger problem that is more difficult to resolve.
- Providers and staff can also become “burned out” which then leads to negative attitudes, poor quality of service, and negative health outcomes.

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- Health literacy is influenced by the language we speak; our ability to communicate clearly and listen carefully; and our age, socioeconomic status, cultural background, past experiences, cognitive abilities, and mental health.

– *National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy*

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Health Communication

- Increase the proportion of adults whose health care providers involved them in decisions as much as they wanted.
- Increase the proportion of adults whose health care providers checked their understanding.
- Decrease the proportion of adults who report poor communication with their health care provider.
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Health Communication

- Increase the proportion of adults with limited English proficiency who say their providers explain things clearly.
- Increase the health literacy of the population.

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Healthy People 2030

- The Health and Human Services Health People initiative helps individuals, organizations, and communities committed to improving health and well-being address public health priorities.
- Organizations use Health People goals to set their own priorities.
- Health Literacy is a major theme in the HP 2030 goals.

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Health Disparities

- Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by populations that have been disadvantaged by their social or economic status, geographic location, and environment (CDC, 2022).

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Health Equity

- It is defined as “the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health” (CDC, 2024).
- Social determinants of health are factors that impact health equity.

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Economic Stability

- Reduce the proportion of people living in poverty.
- Reduce the proportion of adolescents and young adults who aren't in school or working.
- Increase employment in working-age people.
- Increase the proportion of children living with at least 1 parent who works full time.

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Education Access and Quality

- Increase the proportion of children who are developmentally ready for school.
- Increase the proportion of children and adolescents who get preventive mental health care in school.
- Increase interprofessional prevention education in health professions training programs.

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Health Care Access and Quality

- Increase the number of community organizations that provide prevention services.
- Increase the proportion of people with a substance use disorder who got treatment in the past year.
- Reduce the proportion of people who can't get prescription medicines when they need them.

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Health Care Access and Quality

- Reduce the proportion of people who can't get medical care when they need it.
- Increase the ability of primary care and behavioral health professionals to provide more high-quality care to patients who need it.

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Neighborhood and Built Environment

- Reduce the rate of minors and young adults committing violent crimes.
- Increase the proportion of schools with policies and practices that promote health and safety.
- Reduce deaths from motor vehicle crashes.
- Increase the proportion of smoke free homes.

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Social and Community Context

- Reduce the proportion of children with a parent or guardian who has served time in jail.
- Reduce bullying of transgender students.

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Universal Precautions Approach

- Simplifying communication with and confirming comprehension for all patients.
- Making the office environment and health care system easier to navigate.
- Supporting patients' efforts to improve their health.
- Health literacy is situational. It does not discriminate.

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Community Partners

- Creating sustainable, effective linkages between the clinical and community settings can improve patients' access to preventive and chronic care services by developing partnerships between organizations that share a common goal of improving the health of people and communities in which they live.

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Health Literate Systems

- Some of the benefits of health literate organizations are:
 - Meets the needs of the populations with a range of health literacy skills while avoiding stigmatization.
 - Provides easy access to health information and services and navigation assistance.
 - Designs and distributes media content that is easy to understand and act on.

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Strategies for Health Literate Organizations

- Apply improvement methods
- Improve verbal interaction
- Improve written communication
- Link to supportive systems
- Engage patients as partners

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Productive Interactions

- Productive interactions between patients and providers involve ongoing conversations, either face to face or facilitated by media such as patient portals.

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Productive Interactions

- During these interactions, patients and providers align their understanding of medical terms, prevention and treatment options, and care plans – and set expectations for how they will meet their outcome goals.

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Prepared, Proactive, Health Literate Health Care Team

- Leaders of health literate organizations foster productive interactions throughout their organizations by:
 - Building these interactions into organizational policy development, delivery systems, and patient portals.

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Prepared, Proactive, Health Literate Health Care Team

- Encouraging community partners to engage in productive interactions with patients.
- Using interactions to obtain patient feedback and adapt to patients' evolving needs for understandable and actionable information.

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Takeaways

- Health literacy is important because it helps improve health outcomes.
- The Social Determinants of Health impact health literacy and health equity.
- Being a culturally competent provider is important in disease management.

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Takeaways

- Using plain language is a way to effectively communicate with patients/clients.
- Using plain language is a way to effectively communicate with patients/clients.
- Using plain language is a way to effectively communicate with patients/clients.

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- **Thank you!!!**
- **For more information on Health Literacy please visit, www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/learn**
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