Health Equity and Communication Strategies for Nurses and Social Workers

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

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Presenter

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Objectives

- Define health equity and distinguish the difference between equality and equity

- Understand key components of health equity

- Define health literacy and describe how communication strategies impact health literacy

- Demonstrate how to communicate in a culturally competent manner and assess patient understanding

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About Me

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Gap in Knowledge and Practice

- **Nurses and social workers interact DIRECTLY with the population, providing education, resources, and care.**

- **Patient education alone is not enough to achieve major public health goals.**

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Importance of Health Literacy and Communication

Healthcare professionals may not recognize low health literacy or understand the impact on health outcomes.

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For Nurses

- 80% of nurses reported that they never or rarely formally assessed health literacy
- 27% never or rarely ask if a patient had difficulty reading medical information or completing medical forms

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For Social Workers

- Little attention on health literacy in social work literature
- Health social workers work with many patients with low health literacy and are an asset to address these issues

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Health Equity

When every person can "attain his or her full health potential" and no one is "disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances."

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Equality

- Giving each individual or group of people the same exact resources or opportunities
- Does not consider differences in background or circumstances
- Focus-providing same exact resources

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Equity

- Understanding that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome
- Focus-achievement of equal outcome

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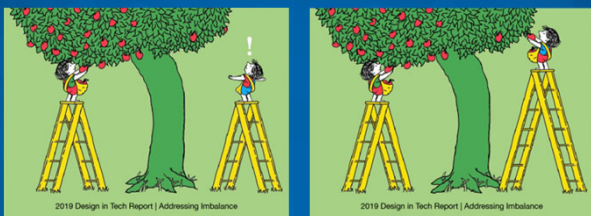_____

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Inequity

- "Reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment."

- Result of disparities in key contributing factors of health equity

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Factors of Health Equity

- Social position
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Religion
- Sexual Identity
- Disability
- Income

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Social Determinants of Health

- "The conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks."

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Social Determinants of Health

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Health Equity in Alabama

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Race/Ethnicity

- Inequities among Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Latinx, and Asian residents in U.S.

- 36% of all counties in the U.S are at least 25% non-white

- 57% of all counties in AL are at least 25% non-white

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Life Expectancy

- **U.S. life expectancy average 78.5 years**

- **AL average life expectancy 75.5 years in 66/67 counties**

- **Life expectancy in AL is significantly lower in counties with higher proportions of non-White residents**

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Income

- **U.S. median annual income $60,336**

- **AL median annual income $48,123**

- **20.2% lower median annual income in AL than in the U.S.**

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Broadband Infrastructure

- **6.5% of U.S. residents lack access to broadband**

- **13.9% of AL residents lack access to broadband**

- **In 26 of 67 AL counties, at least half of all county residents lack broadband**

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Mental Health Workforce Shortages

- U.S. average Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) score 15.5

- AL average HPSA score 16.4

- 82% of AL counties are designated mental health HPSAs

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Health Literacy

"the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information needed to make appropriate health decisions."

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Health Literacy and Decision-Making

- The ability to UNDERSTAND and USE health information, allowing patients to make well-informed decisions

- Allow patient control and advocacy

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Common Reasons for Low Health Literacy

- Healthcare providers use words patients don't understand
- Low education skills
- Cultural barriers to healthcare
- Limited English proficiency

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Ways to Improve Health Literacy

- Use active verbs and plain language
- Recognize that despite low literacy patients have life skills to live meaningful lives
- Acknowledge that many people with English as a secondary language are highly literate in a non-English language.

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Ways to Improve Health Literacy (continued)

- Recognize people may not be literate in their primary language
- Avoid assumptions
- Consider lack of digital access and literacy

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National Action Plan (NAP)

- Released in 2010

- All people have the right to health information that helps them make informed decisions

- Health services should be delivered in ways that are easy to understand and that improve health, longevity, and quality of life

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Goal 1

- Goal 1: Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable.

- Example: providing patients/clients with approved resources that are evidence-based or fact-checked

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Goal 2

- Goal 2: Promote changes in the healthcare delivery system that improve information, communication, informed decision-making, and access to health services.

- Example: advocacy for patients/clients to improve health equity

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Goal 3

- Goal 3: Incorporate accurate and standards-based health and developmentally appropriate health and science information and curricula into childcare and education through the university level

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Goal 4

- Goal 4: Support and expand local efforts to provide adult education, English-language instruction, and culturally and linguistically appropriate health information services in the community.
- Example: Identify patients/clients who lack understanding of materials and communicate with them in a culturally competent manner

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Goal 5

- Goal 5: Build partnerships, develop guidance, and change policies.

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Goal 6

- **Goal 6: Increase basic research and the development, implementation, and evaluation of practices and interventions to improve health literacy.**

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Goal 7

- **Goal 7: Increase the dissemination and use of evidence-based health literacy practices and interventions.**

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Communication Strategies

Ways that we communicate

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Types of Communication

- Presentations
- Training modules
- Posters
- Flyers
- Brochures
- Radio/TV advertisements
- Reports
- Verbal communication

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Selecting Appropriate Communication Strategies

- Patient, client, or population specific
- Understand the target audience

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Target Audience

- Intended audience of a program, project, or intervention.
- Collect background information: education level, language, age, gender, location, and interests
- Ensure patient/population-specific communication

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Communication Language

Addressing Health Literacy

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CLAS Standards

- Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services
- "Provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs."

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Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Calculator

- Determines the ease of reading based on a US grade-level scale
- For the general public, the recommended grade level is 7th-8th grade

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Using Flesch-Kincaid

- Google search of "Flesch-Kincaid grade level calculator" and click on one of the free websites
- Copy and paste your text and hit calculate
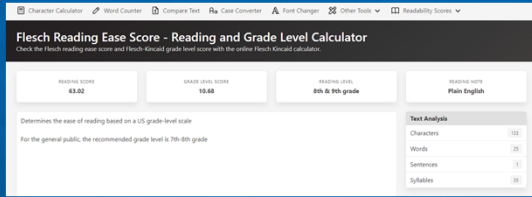
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Flesch Kincaid in Desktop Microsoft Word
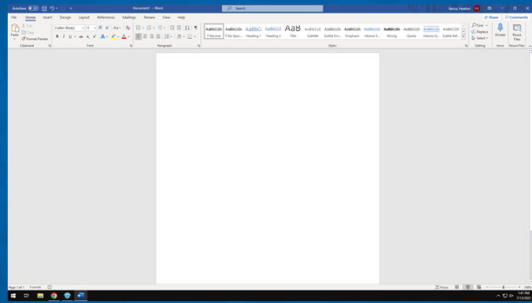

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Flesch Kincaid in Desktop Microsoft Word

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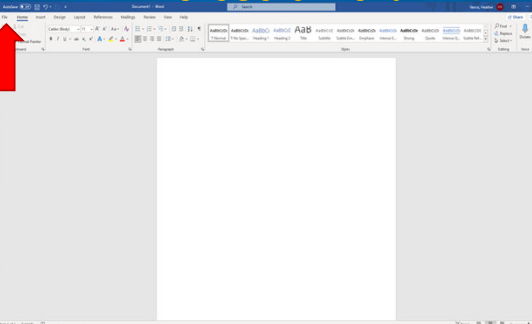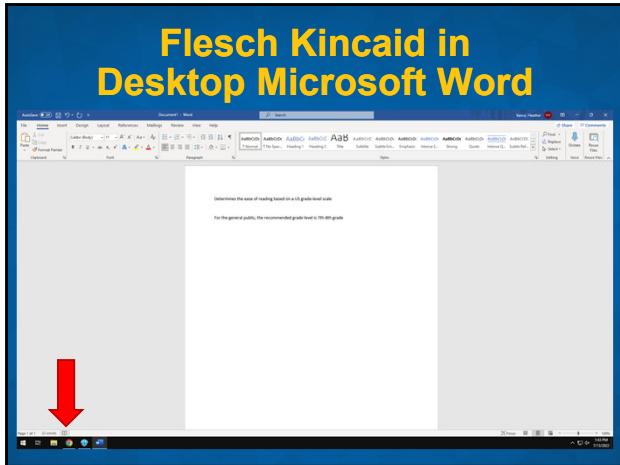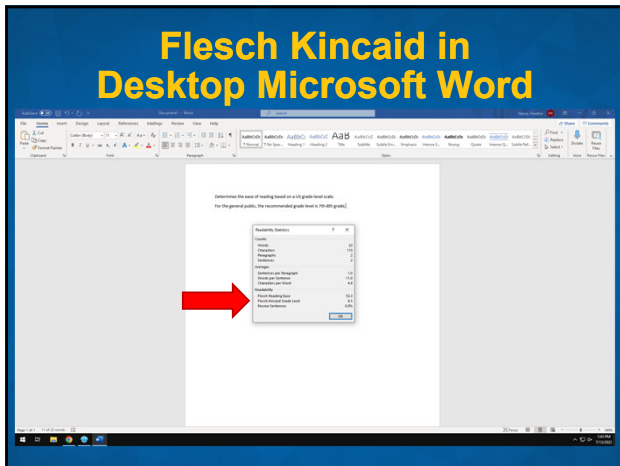
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Flesch-Kincaid in Online Microsoft Word

- When you're using Word for Microsoft 365, you can quickly see readability statistics for your document.
- Open your Word document.
- Select the Home tab.
- Choose Editor, and then go to Document stats.
- A dialog box will appear letting you know Word is calculating your document stats. Choose OK.
- Word will open a window that shows you information about the statistics and reading level of your document.

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Verbal Communication Strategies

- Focus on the issue
- Be genuine
- Empathize
- Be flexible
- Value experiences
- Use affirming response
- Use plain and clear language

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Community Engagement

- Builds trust and relationship
- "A foundational part of the process to develop culturally relevant, unbiased communication for health promotion, research, or policy making."

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Gauging Patient Understanding

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Teach-Back Method

- Check understanding of conversation or communication provided to a patient
- Demonstrates how well the concept was explained
- Use throughout education and counseling

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Examples of Teach-Back

"We covered a lot today and I want to make sure that I explained things clearly. So, let's review what we discussed. Can you please describe the 3 things you agreed to do to help you control your diabetes?"

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Conclusion

- Define health equity and distinguish the difference between equality and equity
- Understand key components of health equity
- Define health literacy and describe how communication strategies impact health literacy
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Evaluation Form

- **In order to receive credit for this training, you must watch the entire program, then complete and return the sign-in sheet and evaluation.**

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