

Health Literacy and Care of the Patient with Heart Failure: A Fact Sheet

What is Health Literacy? ¹

- ◆ Health literacy is the degree to which individuals obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions

What are Some Basic Facts about Health Literacy in the U.S.? ²⁻⁵

- ◆ 47% of adults have limited literacy skills
- ◆ 44% of adults are functionally illiterate
- ◆ Conversely, only 12% of adults have proficient health literacy
- ◆ 34-54% of heart failure patients have limited health literacy
- ◆ Patients often feel embarrassed and conceal the fact that they cannot read.

Do Provider Perceptions Contribute to the Problem of Health Literacy? ^{2,6,7}

- ◆ Healthcare providers are often unaware of their patients' reading ability
- ◆ Healthcare providers vary in their beliefs about the importance of health literacy
- ◆ Physicians overestimate patients' understanding of health information

What are the Consequences of Limited Health Literacy? ⁸⁻¹²

- ◆ Decreased health knowledge
- ◆ Poor self-management skills
- ◆ Decreased use of preventive services
- ◆ Poor medication adherence or ability to identify own medications
- ◆ Decreased ability to complete activities of daily living
- ◆ Decreased physical and mental health
- ◆ Increased hospitalizations and use of emergency services
- ◆ Increased healthcare costs – up to \$73 billion per year attributable to limited literacy
- ◆ Increased mortality

What Risk Factors are Associated with Limited Health Literacy? ^{1-3, 13}

- ◆ Older age
- ◆ Limited education
- ◆ Lower income
- ◆ Chronic disease
- ◆ Having English as a second language
- ◆ Poor mental health

What are Some Strategies for Healthcare Providers? ^{1,14,15}

- ◆ Learn more about health literacy
- ◆ Assess patients for health literacy using a streamlined process
- ◆ Make effective communication with patients a priority
- ◆ Understand and recognize the barriers to effective communication
- ◆ Provide an environment and culture that invites patients to ask questions

What is Being Done about All Patients with Limited Health Literacy? ^{15,16}

- ◆ JCAHO and NCQA have guidelines specifying the need to document patients' learning style preferences.
- ◆ National organizations are recognizing the need to address limited literacy: These include the American Medical Association, the Institute of Medicine, Healthy People 2010, the National Institutes of Health, and the Heart Failure Society of America.
- ◆ The National Work Group on Literacy and Health encourages providers to “get smart” about patient education strategies.

What Tools are Available to Assess Health Literacy?

- ◆ **The Newest Vital Sign** using a food label to test literacy
- ◆ **SILS** Single Item Literacy Screener¹⁷
- ◆ **WRATR** Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised reading subtest
- ◆ **REALM** Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine
- ◆ **TOFHLA** Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults, short and long versions

How Do You Test Readability of Existing Tools and Educational Materials?

- ◆ Smog Index (Statistical Measure of Gobbledygook)
- ◆ Flesch-Kincaid Formula
- ◆ Dale-Chall
- ◆ Fog Index
- ◆ Fry Graph

What are Some Examples of Evidence-Based Research Supporting Patient Interventions in Heart Failure?

- ◆ When a low literacy educational tool developed and used in a pilot study was incorporated into a disease management intervention (individual patient education session and supportive tapered phone calls), HF patients had improved self care tendencies and improved symptoms over the usual care group. ⁴
- ◆ A randomized trial using picture-based patient education tools and digital scales for self weighing and telephone follow-up reported that HF patients had fewer hospitalizations and deaths. ¹⁸

What Resources are Available to Learn More about Health Literacy?

- ◆ <http://www.iom.edu/?id=19750>
- ◆ <http://www.nih.gov/icd/od/ocpl/resources/improvinghealthliteracy.htm>
- ◆ www.healthypeople.gov/Document/HTML/Volume1/11HealthCom.htm
- ◆ <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006483>
- ◆ <http://www.aarc.org/headlines/jcaho>
- ◆ <http://nnlm.gov/outreach/consumer/hlthlit.html>
- ◆ <http://www.nifl.gov/>
- ◆ <http://www.hrsa.gov/healthliteracy>
- ◆ http://www.chcs.org/publications3960/publications_show.htm?doc_id=291711
- ◆ <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy>
- ◆ <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcsums/litsum.htm>
- ◆ <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006483>
- ◆ <http://uuhs.utah.edu/pated/authors/readability.html>
- ◆ <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/overview.html>
- ◆ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8115.html>
- ◆ <http://cahealthliteracy.org>

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