Health literacy: life support from library and knowledge specialists

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Health literacy

Both system and personal roles to:
- Access
- Understand
- Appraise
- Use

“The personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health”

WHO 2015

https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/themes/health-literacy/
Scale: literacy element (16-65 years)

Text (literacy) component of health materials

National average 43% not understanding

Slide taken from Presentation to the Health Literacy Group UK Seminar ‘Improving health information to promote health literacy’
Gill Rowlands, Professor, University of Newcastle and Aarhus University, March 2015
Scale: literacy and numeracy (16-65 years)

Text (literacy) AND numeracy component of health materials

National average 61% not understanding

Slide taken from Presentation to the Health Literacy Group UK Seminar ‘Improving health information to promote health literacy’ - Gill Rowlands, Professor, University of Newcastle and Aarhus University, March 2015
Continuum of experience

• **Functional** – read appointment letters, understand time, follow simple medicines guidance
• **Interactive** - ability to balance content from different sources and to make decisions
• **Critical** – ability to read critically and to challenge sources
“I’m a professor, yet the first thing I did was I put ‘breast cancer’ into Google… because you’re frightened.”

Trisha Greenhalgh
Personal experience
Low health literacy

What does it feel like?
What does this mean?
Code
It was just…
How did it make you feel?
Implications

• Misunderstanding
• Poor decisions
• Exacerbated inequalities
• Inappropriate use of medication
• Ineffective access to health services
• Poor health outcomes
Addressing health literacy

How can we help?
“How to” guide

Definitions

General communication

Verbal communication

Written communication:
  • Style
  • Design
  • Print
  • Pictures, photographs and symbols

https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/health-literacy
Potential LKS roles

• Raising awareness of:
  – Issue;
  – Techniques;
  – Resources.

• Identifying sources for patient information materials

• Contributing to evidence-based patient information that is widely accessible
# Health literacy friendly services 1/2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>• Guidance to staff on language used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• User testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken communication</td>
<td>• Guidance to staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff use of tools, such as teach back, to check communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Help offered as a matter of routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
<td>• Patient information materials either held in a range of formats or guidance on accessing range of formats</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Health literacy friendly services 2/2

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<th>Element</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signage</strong></td>
<td>- Regular review of external signage to ensure service can be located</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Testing with library users of signage within service</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>- Training on health literacy awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Training appropriate to roles on health literacy skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy</strong></td>
<td>- Policies for the services reflect the health literacy needs of staff and service users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- [Health literacy policy for the service]</td>
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</tbody>
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Knowledge for Healthcare

• First 5 years of 15 year framework
• Consulting on next 5 years
• Patient information and health literacy part of the developments

https://kfh.libraryservices.nhs.uk/