

Health Literacy Update

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New Health Literacy Kits Are Here!

The AMA Foundation is pleased to announce that the 2003 Health Literacy Educational Kits are completed!

As an expanded version of the kit that was introduced in 2001, this new module (shown right) is the Foundation's primary tool for informing physicians, health care professionals and patient advocates about health literacy. Kits include:

- a comprehensive manual for clinicians
- a new video documentary
- a CD-ROM with digital files of the manual, video and presentation hand-outs
- Continuing Medical Education* credit
- patient literature and buttons for office staff
- additional resources for education and involvement.

Ten thousand kits will be distributed at no charge to members of state/county medical societies, specialty societies, and AMA Alliances to launch grassroots educational programs. Kits can be purchased on an individual basis for \$35 at www.amapress.com or by calling 800-621-8335 (please mention AMA Press Item #0P221002).

For more information, please visit www.amafoundation.org/go/healthliteracy.

*The American Medical Association (AMA) is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians. The AMA designates this educational activity for a maximum of 2.5 Category 1 credits toward the AMA Physician's Recognition Award. Each physician should claim only those credits that he/she actually spent in the activity.



Below: A scene from "Health Literacy: Help Your Patients Understand", the new video documentary included in the kit.



Health Literacy: By The Numbers

Percentage of adults who may struggle with low health literacy: **48%**

Percentage of physicians who know about low health literacy: **33%**

Estimated annual cost of extra doctor visits and longer hospital stays incurred by patients with low health literacy: **\$73,000,000,000.**

Percentage of physicians who make changes in patient communications after learning about health literacy: **66%**

Survey Says Physician Awareness Is Top Priority

A recent AMA Foundation survey found that awareness of the term health literacy and the issues associated with it needs to be raised among physicians—approximately two-thirds had not previously heard of the term.

However, after learning about health literacy, 87 percent of physicians ranked the issue as "important" to patient care, and 66 percent of physicians already aware of health literacy reported making changes to enhance communication with their patients.

"I think many physicians are surprised to hear that their patients still have some confusion after leaving a consultation," comments Joseph Riggs, MD, President of the AMA Foundation and an AMA Trustee.

"This is the awareness that the kit offers, and through awareness comes physician concern that patients clearly understand and are comfortable with the information and instructions that they've been given. I expect awareness of this problem will bring swift and meaningful changes in clinical practice."

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Reports Confirm Importance of Health Literacy

More and more health care professionals are agreeing that health literacy is an issue that must be addressed.

In the March 5, 2003 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, a team of Boston researchers revealed that many individuals over age 65 take their medications improperly, which could lead to adverse, and possibly deadly, reactions.

Of all seniors, 90% take at least one medication per week and 40% take five or more medications per week, creating a high probability for error.

“What we’ve found is that there are about 50 adverse drug events for every 1,000 people every year,” said David Bates, MD, chief of internal medicine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the study’s lead investigator.

“Statistically, that’s a significant number of people who are clearly struggling to understand and maintain their prescription regimens.”

In a separate report, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies identified health literacy as one of the country’s top priorities for improving the quality and delivery of health care.

The report, *Priority Areas for National Action: Transforming Health Care Quality*, lists 20 issues in alphabetical order, not by rank of importance. Of those priority areas, health literacy is one of only two classified as “cross-cutting” because it affects patients suffering from all types of medical conditions. The report describes efforts to improve health literacy as “essential for effective self-management and collaborative care.”

“By focusing on the importance of health literacy and self-management, the Institute of Medicine has put the patient first, rather than the illness,” commented Joseph Riggs, MD, President of the AMA Foundation and an AMA Trustee.

The AMA Foundation applauds both of these reports for helping raise awareness about health literacy.

Program Spotlight Indiana Alliance Raises Awareness at Local Hospital



Floor by floor. Office by office. Face to face. One on one.

The Bartholomew/Brown County Medical Alliance is raising awareness about health literacy by partnering with Columbus Regional Hospital, a major community facility.

The Alliance – an organization comprised of AMA members’ spouses – makes appointments with physicians for a brief presentation about health literacy.

“Physicians and staff have told us that our presentation was a real eye-opener,” says Alliance member Laurel Weddle. “They can sense when a patient is confused, but now they know how to address it.”

The hospital and Alliance created a Health Literacy Committee and do follow-up training with office staff. The AMA Foundation’s Health Literacy Kit plays an important part in the training: they show the documentary video, distribute information, and talk about how staff and physicians can better serve patients struggling with low health literacy.

Soon, Columbus Regional Hospital will evaluate several highly-used patient forms and make recommendations to improve their “reader-friendliness.” One example of the success of the hospital’s internal Health Literacy Campaign: a new binder of information for post-operation cardiac patients was written at a 5th Grade reading level and includes numerous illustrations to increase compliance and overall health.

The AMA Foundation applauds the hard work of the Bartholomew/Brown County Medical Alliance and Columbus Regional Hospital! For more information about their joint efforts, please contact Laurel Weddle at clweddle@hsonline.net.

Join the AMA Foundation’s Health Literacy Coalition at the Foundation’s website or by calling our main hotline.

Spread The Word!

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We Want to Hear from You!

What are you doing to address low health literacy? What are your thoughts about this newsletter and our website? Please send your information and comments to healthliteracy@ama-assn.org.