Oral Health Literacy: A Means of Improving Oral Health

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What is Health Literacy?

Definition:

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

Healthy People 2010
Why is Health Literacy Important?

- The lower the health literacy, the more likely the individual will have poor health, use fewer preventive procedures, and use costly ER services.
- Health literacy varies by race, ethnicity, level of education, and poverty level.
- Less likely to manage chronic health conditions.

National Assessment of Adult Literacy 2003
Special Considerations

Reasons for limited skills vary greatly

- Language barriers
- Developmental disabilities
- Learning disabilities
- Psychological illness
- Advanced age
- Time restraints/stress
- Illness

- Limited health literacy part of the challenge
- Improving health literacy part of community-based solutions
- Health literacy improvement must begin at least by school age
National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health (2003)

- Action 1: Change perceptions of oral health
  - Enhance oral health literacy
- Action 2: Overcome barriers by replicating effective programs and proven efforts
  - Enhance health promotion and health literacy
- Action 4: Increase oral health workforce diversity, capacity and flexibility
  - Provide training in communication skills and cultural competence to health care providers and students
What is Oral Health Literacy?

Definition:

“The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic oral health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

Healthy People 2010
Oral Health Literacy is Associated with:

- Knowledge and understanding of preventive measures
- Frequency of dental visits
- Severity of dental caries
- Oral health quality of life

- Provides framework for understanding oral health, health literacy, and points of intervention
- States evidence from medicine and public health and indicates oral health has similar problems
- Calls for more research
- Provides guiding questions

National Action Plan

to Improve

Health Literacy

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
HHS National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (2010)
Seven Goals

- Health information creation and dissemination
- Health care services
- Early childhood through university education
- Community-based services
- Partnership and collaboration
- Research and evaluation
- Dissemination of evidence-based practice
Healthy People

- **2010 Oral Health Focus Area: Explicit statement**
  - To promote oral health and prevent oral disease, oral health literacy among all groups is necessary.

- **2020 Oral Health Topic Area: Where is health literacy?**
  - Discusses “awareness” and “acceptance” of oral health measures.
  - Background statement: A person’s ability to access oral health care is associated with factors such as education level, income, race and ethnicity.
Advancing Oral Health in America (2011)

- Report from IOM to HHS
- “Nearly all aspects of oral health care require literacy.” (pg. 51)
- “The organization of the health system can also enhance or inhibit health literacy.” (pg. 53)
- “Individual practitioners, health organizations, and HHS can all take actions to mitigate the effects of low health literacy.” (pg. 53)
NIH Oral Health and Health Literacy Research (2004-2012)

- NIH-wide program announcement
- NIDCR has funded $15.5 million
- Examples: Funded research projects
  - Examination of oral health literacy in public health practice
  - Health literacy and oral health knowledge
  - Latinos’ health literacy, social support, and oral health knowledge and behaviors
  - Development of an oral health literacy instrument
  - Use of videogames to promote oral health knowledge
  - Health literacy and oral health status of African refugees
HHS Oral Health Initiative

- **Office of Minority Health**
  - A cultural competency e-learning continuing education program for oral health professionals

- **Office on Women’s Health**
  - Oral health as part of women’s health across the lifespan

http://www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/clinical/oralhealth/hhsinitiative.pdf
NIDCR
- Easy-to-read oral health education brochures
- Currently developing video version of several brochures to reach people with limited literacy skills

CDC
- Tested messages/graphics used to develop the “Brush Up on Healthy Teeth” fluoride education materials for parents of young children.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- text4Baby
- National Children’s Health Coverage Campaign
Maryland Oral Health Literacy Social Marketing Campaign

- Parameters
  - CDC Grant, 18 month, $840,000

- Audience:
  - Pregnant women and mothers of at-risk children age birth through 6 years

- Goals:
  - Gain audience attention
  - Inform and educate about proper oral hygiene and cavity prevention skills
  - Inform and help access oral health care
Healthy Teeth Healthy Kids
Statewide Campaign

- TV advertising
- Radio advertising
- Transit advertising
- Direct mail
- Create and distribute oral health kits

- Community outreach
  - Brochures
  - Banners
  - Posters
  - Newsletter articles
  - Presentations
  - Trainings
Campaign Launch
How to Care for Your Child’s Mouth

1. **Clean.** Clean your baby’s gums before teeth come in. Once teeth come in, brush with fluoride toothpaste twice a day, every day, especially before bed.

2. **Visit dentist.** First visit by first birthday. To find a dentist, call 1-855-45-TEETH (83384).

3. **No bottle in bed.** Do not lay your baby down with a bottle at nap time or at night.

4. **Give milk or water.** Give your child milk or water; do not give your child drinks with added sugar, such as soda, juice, or punch.

5. **Do not share food, spoons, or forks.** If you put food or eating utensils in your mouth, do not put them in your child’s mouth to avoid spreading germs that can cause cavities.

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Find a dentist and schedule an appointment for your child today.

Learn more about caring for your child’s mouth.

Spread the word, let others know it is important to care for their child’s mouth.

www.HealthyTeethHealthyKids.org
1-855-45-TEETH (83384)

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Give your child a healthy mouth for life.

Healthy Teeth Healthy Kids

Maryland Dental Action Coalition
640 Dobbin Road
Columbia, MD 21045

1-855-45-TEETH
www.HealthyTeethHealthyKids.org

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www.HealthyTeethHealthyKids.org
1-855-45-Teeth (83384)
## Healthy Teeth Healthy Kids Campaign Timeline

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Plain Language Act of 2010

Requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a “clear, concise, well-organized” manner that follows the best practices of plain language writing.

http://www.plainlanguage.gov/
Other Activities and Resources

- **Health Literacy Plans**
  - CDC Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy
  - AHRQ Health Literacy Action Plan

- **Training and Education**
  - Clear Communication: NIH Health Literacy Initiative
  - CDC Health Literacy Portal
    - [http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy)
  - HRSA Training for Health Care Professionals

- **Resources**
  - IHS Health Literacy Tools and Resources
  - CMS Health Literacy Toolkit
The Way Forward

- Assure a more competent workforce
  - Train clinicians in communication skills/cultural competency
  - Have staff complete CDC/HRSA courses in health literacy
- Use plain language in publications and Web sites
  - Oral health care prevention and education, special populations, access to care, coverage
- Assist patients with disease self-management
- Assess and improve user friendliness of our clinics
- Utilize guidance, resources and tools
  - Action steps are outlined and resources available for health professionals to make health information and services accurate, accessible, and actionable.
- Foster and enhance collaboration (internal and external)
Thank you!

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For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.