Health Literacy Summary

“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”

Functional

• Having the basic skills needed to function in everyday life and typical healthcare interactions

For example:

the ability to read appointment letters;
understand time;
follow simple medicine instructions.

Interactive/critical

• Ability to interpret and balance plus appraise information from different sources as part of decision-making process. Confidence and motivation to seek out information and make decisions and recognize wider social/health issues

Some statistics

43% of adults (16-65) do not have adequate literacy skills to routinely understand health information.

61% of adults (16-65) do not have adequate numeracy skills to routinely understand health information.


Who is affected?

• People living with socio-economic disadvantage
• People with low educational attainment
• Older people
• People who have a long term health condition
• People with disabilities
• People with low information and technology skills

But can affect us all in a stressful health situation

Impact

People with lower health literacy/education levels are more likely to have:

• More unhealthy behaviours; alcohol, poor diet/obesity, smoking
• Fewer healthy behaviours; good diet/normal weight
• Lower levels of self-rated health
• Lower response to public healthy living campaigns
People with lower health literacy more likely to:

- Have higher mortality
- Have more difficulty managing medication
- Have a higher prevalence of long-term conditions (LTCs)
- LTCs more likely to be limiting
- Are less likely to engage with disease prevention e.g. cancer screening, immunisation

People with health literacy issues may impact on the system:

- Inappropriate decision for the patient
- Missed appointments
- Wasted medication
- Inappropriate use of services e.g. greater use of A&E
- More likely to be hospitalised/longer hospital stays

Solutions

- Using techniques that empower individuals such as Teach Back and Chunk and Check
- Ensuring written information is at an appropriate level for the audience
- Hospital signage
- Language used in patient communication