Small steps for literacies; giant leap for health

Ruth Carlyle
Strategic Lead for NHS Library and Knowledge Services - East of England and Midlands
Small steps and giant leap
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

Getting local: the words

- Cheltenham: 35.10%
- Gloucester: 41.70%
- Oxford: 40.41%
- Slough: 53.99%
- Bath & NE Somerset: 38.00%
- Poole: 38.19%
- Portsmouth: 43.90%
- IoW: 42.73%
- Cornwall: 42.02%
- W Devon: 37.97%
- N Devon: 41.06%
- N Dorset: 35.77%
- Plymouth: 43.77%
- Hart: 27.48%

http://healthliteracy.geodata.uk/
Getting local: the words + numbers

http://healthliteracy.geodata.uk/
Types of health literacy

- **Functional** – obtain and apply information
- **Interactive** – extract relevant information and apply to changing circumstances
- **Critical** – analyse and gain control

Application of health literacy

- **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
Getting personal
Low health literacy

What does it feel like?
What shape does this describe?

A shape with the largest area for a given length of perimeter, its constants of proportionality are $2\pi$ and $\pi$, respectively.

In an $x$–$y$ Cartesian coordinate system, with centre coordinates $(a, b)$ and radius $r$ is the set of all points $(x, y)$ such that

$$(x - a)^2 + (y - b)^2 = r^2.$$
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
Spoken communication: Teach Back

1. Communicator takes responsibility
2. Tell me
3. Re-explain as needed
4. Continue until both happy with understanding
Spoken communication: Chunk & Check
Written communication

- Keep sentences short, using lists where appropriate
- Use active verbs
- Avoid writing in the third person
- Use words that are appropriate for the reader
## 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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Health literacy friendly services 2/2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Signage** | • Regular review of external signage to ensure service can be located  
• Testing with library users of signage within service |
| **Training** | • Training on health literacy awareness  
• Training appropriate to roles on health literacy skills |
| **Policy** | • Policies for the services reflect the health literacy needs of staff and service users  
• [Health literacy policy for the service] |
Activity now: health literacy awareness

Why does it matter?

- Reducing inequalities
- Informed consent – Montgomery versus Lanarkshire legal case
- Shared decision-making
- The cost of low health literacy is estimated to be 3-5% of the NHS budget (Health Literacy Centre Europe)
- Low health literacy is a significant problem in the UK. For 43% of adults in England, health information is too complex (Rowlands, 2015)
Bringing the literacies together

Health literacy, information literacy, digital literacy
# Models of health literacy, information literacy and digital literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health literacy</th>
<th>Information literacy</th>
<th>Digital literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three levels/dimensions:</td>
<td>Four competencies:</td>
<td>Six domains:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Functional</td>
<td>- Resource discovery</td>
<td>- Digital identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interactive</td>
<td>- Critical assessment</td>
<td>- Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical</td>
<td>- Managing information</td>
<td>- Teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Nutbeam, 2000</td>
<td>- Creation and communication</td>
<td>- Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source: Cambridge Information Literacy Network, 2018</td>
<td>- Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Technical proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source: HEE, 2017 adapted from JISC, 2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The future: e-health literacy

- Future depends on digital literacy and e-health literacy
- Information literacy an enabler of that future

https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/topol-review
The Review Board recommends:

The citizen and the patient

- In a similar way to other public health education initiatives, programmes aimed at engaging and educating the public about genomics and digital healthcare technologies should be developed. (P1)

- The NHS should work with patient and carer organisations to support appropriate patient education. (P2)

- Local arrangements should be established to provide needs-based targeted education and support through existing patient support provision, where possible. (HI1)
Next steps: Knowledge for Healthcare

- First 5 years of 15-year framework
- Developments in 2020 for next 5 years
- Connecting health literacy with digital literacy and information literacy

https://kfh.libraryservices.nhs.uk/
Your local health literacy data

http://healthliteracy.geodata.uk/
What questions or comments do you have?

Ruth Carlyle
@RuthCarlyle  Ruth.Carlyle@hee.nhs.uk