The Strategic Relevance of Health Literacy to Health Marketing and Communication Activities

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Understanding the Meaning of Health Literacy

- Healthy People 2010 defines Health Literacy as:

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

- Each element of Health Literacy is vital to our mission as communicators.

Why Is Health Literacy Important?

Health literacy is important because it affects people's ability to:

- Navigate the healthcare system, including locating providers and services and filling out forms
- Share personal and health information with providers
- Engage in self-care and chronic disease management
- Adopt health-promoting behaviors, such as exercising and eating a healthy diet
- Act on health-related recommendations, news and announcements

Health Literacy Is Important for Everyone!

Everyone has difficulty understanding health information at some point regardless of their literacy level. Contributing factors include:

- Communication skills of lay people and public health professionals…combination of communication skills and health knowledge
- Knowledge of health topics
- Culture
- Demands of the healthcare and public health systems
  - The Hospital Visit
- Demands of the situation/context

Limited health literacy is more than a consumer barrier. It is also a "systems" challenge.

The Science That Proves the 'So What' of Health Literacy

Research has shown health literacy to be associated with a range of outcomes, including patient safety, medication errors, quality of healthcare services, personal health management and self-care, and disparities.
(Research Citations)

- The Future of Drug Safety: Promoting and Protecting the Health of the Public 2007
- Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion 2004
- Priority Areas for National Action: Transforming Healthcare Quality 2003
- Speaking of Health: Assessing Health Communication Strategies for Diverse Populations 2002
- Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century 2001

Measuring Health Literacy

- Health literacy was a new component of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) from the D.Ed.
  - Nationally representative sample of more than 19,000 adults aged 16 and older in the United States
  - Assessment of English literacy using prose, document, and quantitative scales

Determining Levels of Health Literacy

- Proficient: Can perform complex and challenging literacy activities.
- Intermediate: Can perform moderately challenging literacy activities.
- Basic: Can perform simple everyday literacy activities.
- Below Basic: Can perform no more than the most simple and concrete literacy activities.
- Nonliterate in English: Unable to complete a minimum number of screening tasks or could not be tested because did not speak English or Spanish.

Reality Check: People's Difficulty with Selected Health Literacy Tasks

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Below Basic

Circle the date of a medical appointment on a hospital appointment slip. (101)

Basic

Give two reasons a person should be tested for a specific disease, based on information in a clearly written pamphlet. (202)

Average score: 245

Intermediate

Determine what time a person can take a prescription medication, based on information on the drug label that relates the timing of medication to eating. (253)

Proficient

Calculate an employee's share of health insurance costs for a year, using a table. (382)

500

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences

Real World Health Literacy Challenges

Directions

- **do not chew more than directed**
- find the right dose on chart below. If possible, use weight to dose; otherwise use age.
- if needed, repeat dose every **6-8 hours**
- do not use more than **4 times a day**

Dosing Chart

Weight (lb)	Age (yr)	Tablets
under 24	under 2	call a doctor
24–35	2–3	2
36–47	4–5	3
48–59	6–8	4
60–71	9–10	5
72–95	11	6

90 million
Americans would have trouble with this. (Intermediate Level -- 253)

Our Population

Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy. In other words, nearly 9 out of 10 adults may lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease.

(2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy Study)

Audience Segmentation: Considering Audience Differences

The issue of limited health literacy is greater among :

- Older adults
- Those who are poor
- People with limited education
- Minority populations
- Persons with limited English proficiency (LEP)

Reaching People with Limited Health Literacy

Challenges/Barriers for Reaching People with Limited Health Literacy

- Identifying intended audience
- Communication channels
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences

Identifying Intended Audience

- You can't tell by looking
- Limitations to using existing assessment tools
- No 'gold standard' for measuring health literacy

Marketing and Communication Channels

- Information delivery (Channels)
- Complexity of information (Vaccine Schedule)
- Information processing/interpretation (Lay, Media)
- Individual communication/learning styles (Visual, Narrative)
- Conflicting Messages

Language Barriers

- Los estudios indican que una de las razones por las cuales los padres que hablan español no hacen uso de los centros de control de envenenamientos es la barrera del idioma.

- Research has shown that one reason Spanish-speaking parents do not utilize poison control centers because to their fear of a language barrier.

Considering Cultural Differences of Audiences

- Cross-cultural gaps between public health professionals and customers
- Lack of understanding regarding differences in values, beliefs, practices, attitudes, traditions
- Lack of customer-centered services
- Experiences leading to distrust

How Do We Achieve Success?

Health Marketing

- Health Marketing involves **creating**, **communicating**, and **delivering** health information and interventions using customer-centered and science-based strategies to protect and promote the health of diverse populations (CDC, 2005).

- A multi-disciplinary area of practice…Strategic & Integrated Communication - PR, Advertising, Community Relations, Government Communication, Web-based Commuincation…)

Key Concepts of Health Marketing

- Focus on intended audience
- Understand audience perceptions
- Influence action
- Marketing Mix- The four P's
- Competing behaviors
- Exchange (in return time, money for product, service receive behavior youthful and attractive)

Opportunity 1: Know Your Audience

- Take a customer-centered approach
- Who will do what differently?
- Who can you influence most effectively?
- What do they care about?
- What do they struggle with?

Know Your Audience: Limited Health Literacy

- People with limited health literacy often report feeling a sense of shame about their skill level.
- Includes professionals (unable to apply their skills in health context; not being able to explain health information properly), Non-English-speaking individuals, and individuals with limited/low literacy skills…develop strategies to compensate.
- Incorporating health literacy principles can anticipate and help mitigate the *shame* hurdle.

Case Study: Health Literacy & Implications for Health Marketing

In a study done with low-income and minority mothers attending an urban WIC clinic (**N. Kelly N., Groff J. Exploring Barriers to Utlization of Poison Centers: Clinic. Pediatrics 2000**), researchers found the following factors contributed to underutilization of poison control centers:

- African-American ethnicity with low income
- Hispanic ethnicity with low income
- Spanish language preference
- Ages 25 and under
- Less than high school education
- Participate in Medicaid

Opportunity 2: Offer a Better Product

- Involve your audience
- How can you add simplicity? credibility? authenticity?
- How can you adjust your program/ system/relationships – not just your messages?

Is the call-to-action easy to **understand** & **process**? Will it help people make better decisions about their health?

Opportunity 3: Improve Distribution

- Choose the right place and promotion strategies

Health Literacy and Implications for Mass Media Promotion Channels

Percentage of adults with *Below Basic* or *Basic* health literacy who get **little** or **no** health information from the following sources:

Source	Below Basic	Basic
Internet	85%	70%
Magazines	64%	47%
Books or Brochures	62%	45%
Newspapers	59%	51%
Family or Friends	47%	40%
Healthcare Providers	35%	30%
Radio or TV	33%	29%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences

Opportunity 3: Improve Distribution

- Choose the right place and promotion
- Develop/strengthen partnerships
  - Lay health educators/Promotores
- Community-based workshops/Health fairs
  - Community organizations/churches
  - Hospitals (Emergency Rooms), clinics, medical facilities
  - Retailers- WalMart, Lowes, Home Depot

Does your intended audience know why/how to **obtain** your services/products?

Evaluation Is Essential

Evaluate users' understanding *before* (formative), *during* (process), and *after* (outcome) the introduction of materials.

Test! Test! Test!

Incorporating Health Literacy Principles

Remember…

- Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to *obtain, process,* and *understand* basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.
- Health literacy is dependent on both individual and systemic factors:
  1. Communication skills of lay people and professionals
  2. Knowledge of lay people and professionals of health topics
  3. Culture
  4. Demands of the healthcare and public health systems
  5. Demands of the situation/context

Health Marketing and Communication: Real Applications for Health Literacy

Include Health Literacy When:

- Responding to public inquiries
- Developing public health messages/campaigns
- Developing materials, publications, Web sites
- Improving public access to evidence-based health information
- Promoting and disseminating messages, materials, recommendations, and guidelines
- Working with the media/press
- Acting as public liaisons
- Developing and implementing communication plans
- Providing health research results
- Speechwriting
- Contributing to professional and academic publications

CDC's Commitment to Health Literacy and to Our NPHIC Partners

- We know that integrating health literacy principles into your work is an overwhelming process. We can help!

Resources for you include:

- AHRQ Report—*Literacy and Health Outcomes* (2004): www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcsums/litsum.htm
- **National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)**
  A nationally representative and continuing assessment of English language literary skills of American Adults http://nces.ed.gov/naal/
- *Healthy People 2010* Health Literacy Action Plan—*Communicating Health: Priorities and Strategies for Progress* (2003): http://odphp.osophs.dhhs.gov/projects/healthcomm/objective2.htm
- IOM Report—*Health Literacy: A Prescription To End Confusion* (2004): www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=19723
- Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion: Quick Guide to Health Literacy http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/quickguide/

CDC's Commitment to Health Literacy and to Our NPHIC Partners

Specialized Training in Health Literacy Principles for Health Marketing and Communication Professionals to include:

- Web-based Public Health Literacy Training (launch in Winter 2008-2009)

CDC's Commitment to Health Literacy and to Our NPHIC Partners

- CDC Staff:
  Division of Health Communication & Marketing
  Available to Support You…
- **Dr. Cynthia Baur**, Director
- **Laura Ours**
- **Carolyn Brooks**
- **Demetrius M. Parker**

THANK YOU!

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