

Communication and Health Literacy

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**GEC of Greater Philadelphia
Health Equity and Literacy Faculty Development Course
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What Consumers Say...

“Help Your Patients Understand“

American Medical Association Foundation

American Medical Association

2003

Observations

- **Not just “those people”**

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- **Shame is a major issue**

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- **Affects people from entry to exit**

Observations

- **Not just “those people”**
- **Shame is a major issue**
- **Affects people from entry to exit**
- **An issue that is often overlooked**

Initial Issues, Challenges, Solutions

- **Awareness**

Initial Issues, Challenges, Solutions

- **Awareness**
- **Terminology**

Initial Issues, Challenges, Solutions

- **Awareness**
- **Terminology**
- **Assessment**

Awareness

Awareness

- **Magnitude of the issue**

Adult Literacy in the United States

43 per cent of the nation's adults read at very basic levels or below.

Literacy Levels of Adults in America

<u>Reading Ability</u>	<u>NAAL Level</u>	<u>*Approx Grade Level</u>	<u>% of Pop.</u>
- Below Basic	1	0-5	14
- Basic	2	6-8	29
- Intermediate	3	9-12	44
- Proficient	4	College	15

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

* Estimates

Literacy, Race and Ethnicity

<u>NALS</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Pop.</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>White</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Asian</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Black</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Hisp</u>
1	14	7	14	24	44
2	29	25	32	43	30
Totals	43	32	46	67	74

Literacy and Age

<u>NALS</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Pop.</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>16-18</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>19-24</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>25-39</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>40-49</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>50-64</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>65+</u>
1	14	11	11	12	11	13	23
2	29	37	29	25	27	27	38
Totals	43	48	40	37	38	40	61

Awareness

- **Magnitude of the issue**
- **Complexity of the health care system**

Times Have Changed

Ten or fifteen years ago, going to the doctor was a fairly simple matter...

**Joseph A. Riggs, MD
President of the AMA Foundation**

A Complex System

- **Ever-increasing array of medicines**
- **Less time spent in the hospital**
- **More and more complicated self care regimens**
- **Less time spent getting information from doctor**
- **Continued fragmentation of care**
- **Increasing amount of paperwork**

Awareness

- Magnitude of the issue
- Complexity of the health care system
- **Level of shame involved**

Shame and Literacy

**I've had a lot of illnesses,
but I preferred to stay home...**

Baker DW, Parker RM, Williams MV, et. Al.
Arch Fam Med , June 1996

Awareness

- Magnitude of the issue
- Complexity of the health care system
- Level of shame involved
- **Effect on health**

The Hidden Role of Literacy

A 66 year old patient with high blood pressure, angina, diabetes and mild heart failure...

Explaining Illness
Bryan Whalet, edictor,
2000

Literacy and Health

Marginal literacy may present a problem in:

- diagnosis**
- treatment**
- utilization of health care**
- gathering data for studies**

Williams, Parker, Baker
Emory University School of Medicine
Harbor - UCLA Medical Center
Arch Fam Med, 1996

Literacy and Health

Patients with poor reading skills are more likely to:

- be hospitalized**
- require treatment for preventable illnesses**
- ignore notices to come for care**
- die prematurely**

Weiss, et al
University of Arizona College of Medicine
J of Health Care for the Underserved, 1991

Awareness

- Magnitude of the issue
- Complexity of the health care system
- Level of shame involved
- Effect on health
- **Liability issues**

Literacy, Health, and the Law

An Exploration of the Law
and the Plight of Marginal Readers
within the Health Care System:
Advocating for Patients and Providers

R_x



abc

**Health Literacy
Project**
and Consulting Attorneys

Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Inc.

Legal Implications

Attorneys estimate:

Clinician's communication style and attitude are major factors in 75% of malpractice lawsuits

Beckman HB, Markakis KM, et al
Arch Int Med 1994

Patient Dissatisfaction

Communication problems involved in lawsuits

- **Explanation of diagnosis is inadequate**
- **Explanation of treatment is inadequate**
- **Patient feels ignored**
- **Clinician fails to understand perspective of patient or relatives**
- **Clinician discounts or devalues views of patients or relatives**
- **Patient feels rushed**

Vincent C, Young M, et al
Lancet 1994

Hickson GB, Clayton EW, et al
JAMA 1992
JAMA 1994

Slow Down – Here's Why

Data from several state indicate:

- **PCPs who have been the target of malpractice liability claims spend an average of 15 minutes with each patient.**
- **PCPs who have never had a malpractice claim against them spend an average of 18 minutes with each patient.**

Awareness

- Magnitude of the issue
- Complexity of the health care system
- Level of shame involved
- Effect on health
- Liability issues
- Health care costs

Literacy and Health Care Costs

Latest Cost Estimate 10/07

**New Report Estimates Low Health Literacy
Between \$106 Billion and \$236 Billion Annually**

*Low Health Literacy: Implications for National
Health Policy*

**John Vernon, PhD
Department of Finance
University of Connecticut
October 2007**

Issues, Challenges, Solutions

- *Awareness...*
- **Terminology**

Clarify Terminology:

3 Sources of Confusion

A. Literacy vs. Health Literacy

B. “Literate” vs. Easy-to Read, Reader/Patient-Friendly

C. Health Literacy vs. Clear Health Communication

Clarify Terminology – Issue A

A. Literacy vs. Health Literacy

Terminology – Issue A

A. “Literacy” Meaning #1

1. Ability

“The quality or state of being literate,
esp. the *ability* to read and write”

Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary

Terminology – Issue A

A. “Literacy” Meaning #2

1. Ability

“The quality or state of being literate,
esp. the ability to read and write”

2. Knowledge

“A person’s *knowledge* of a particular subject
or field” (e.g., health, health care, financial, computer)

Terminology – Issue A

Literacy vs. Health Literacy

1. Literacy

Issues having to do with people's basic *ability* to read and write

2. Health Literacy

Issues having to do with person's *knowledge of* health and healthcare issues.

Terminology- Issue A

Literacy vs. *Health* Literacy

Health Literacy:

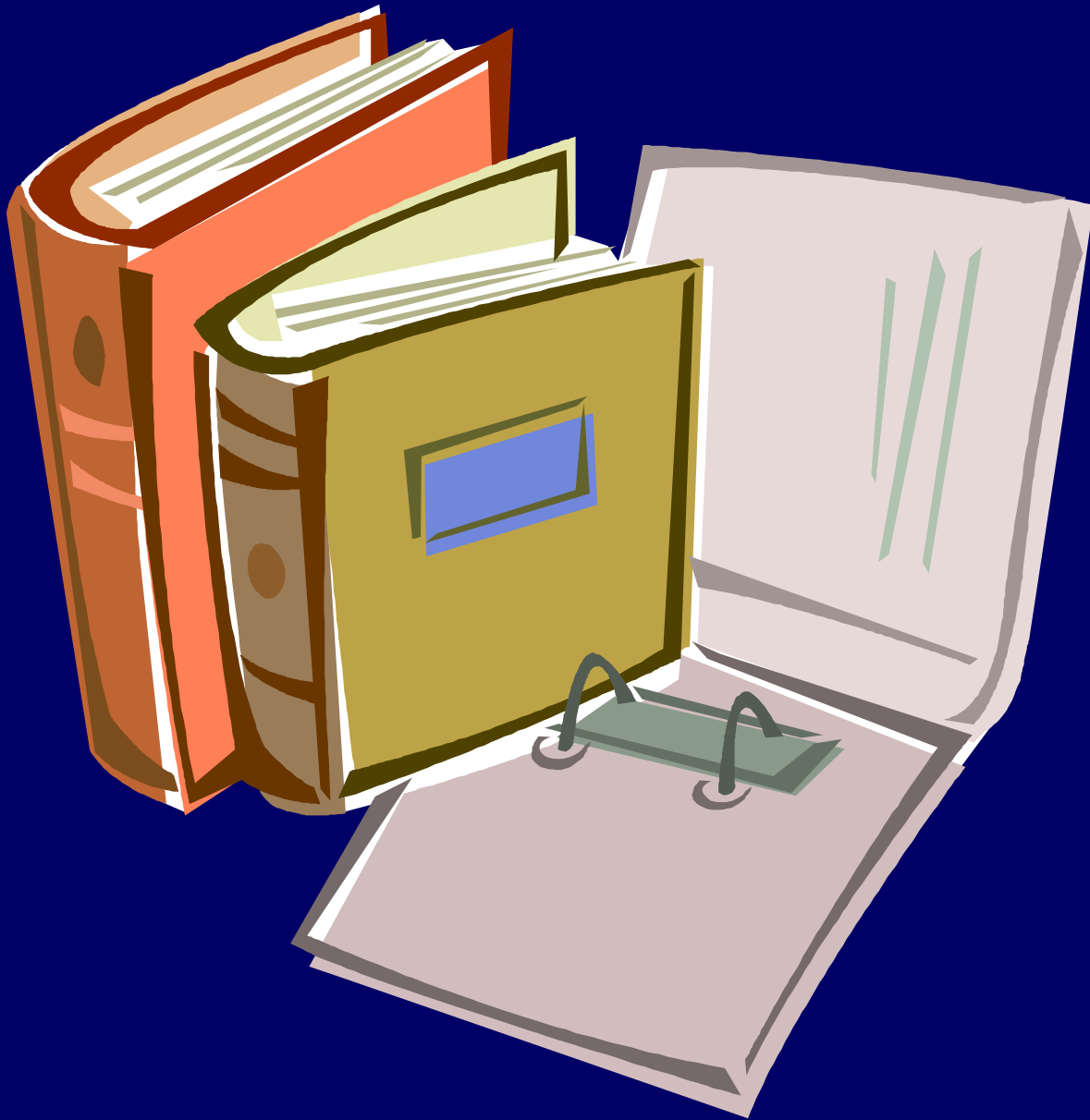
Health literacy is the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand the basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions...

Clarify Terminology –Issue B

A. Literacy vs. Health Literacy

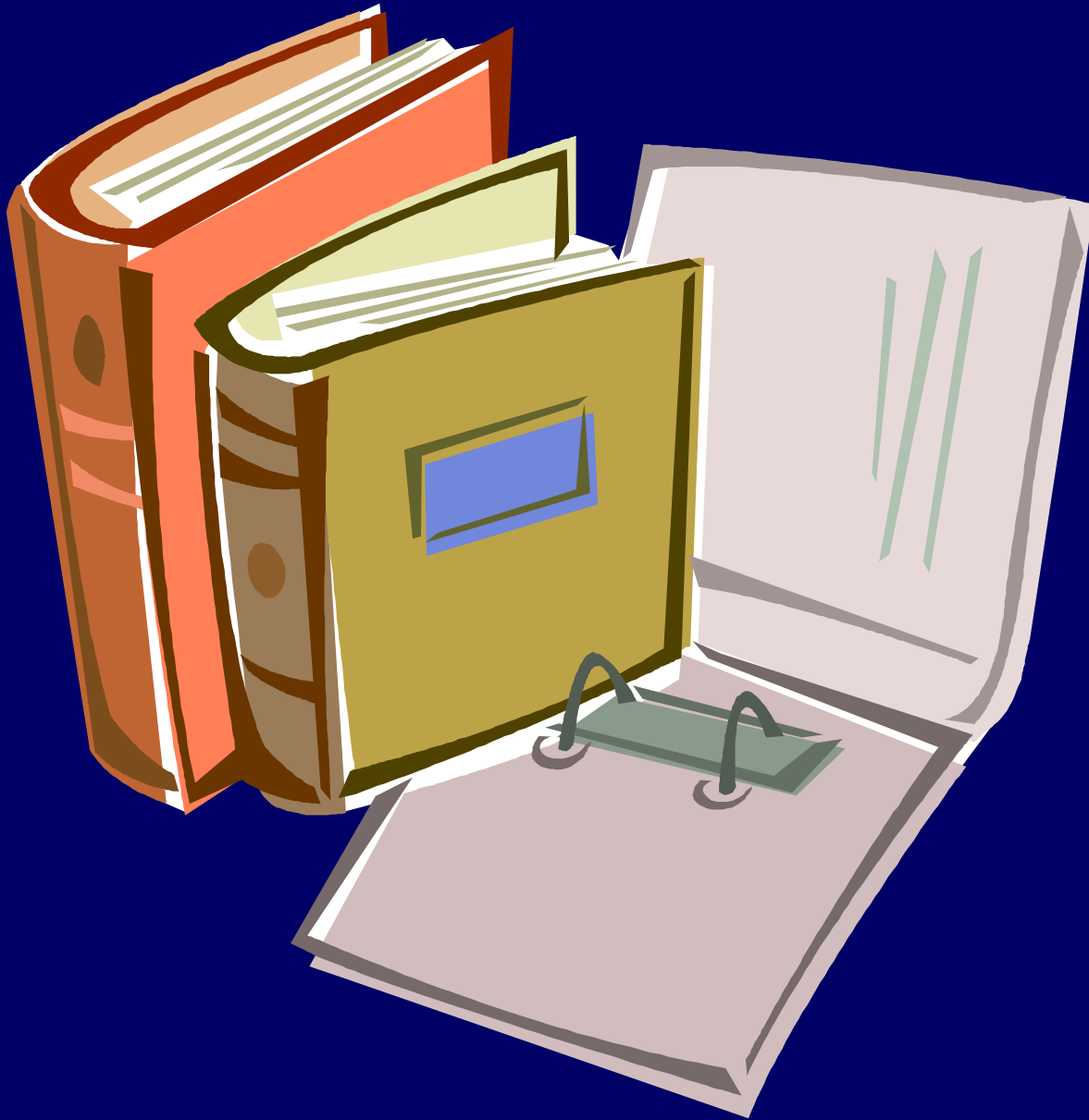
B. “Health Literate” vs. Easy-to Read, Reader/Patient-Friendly

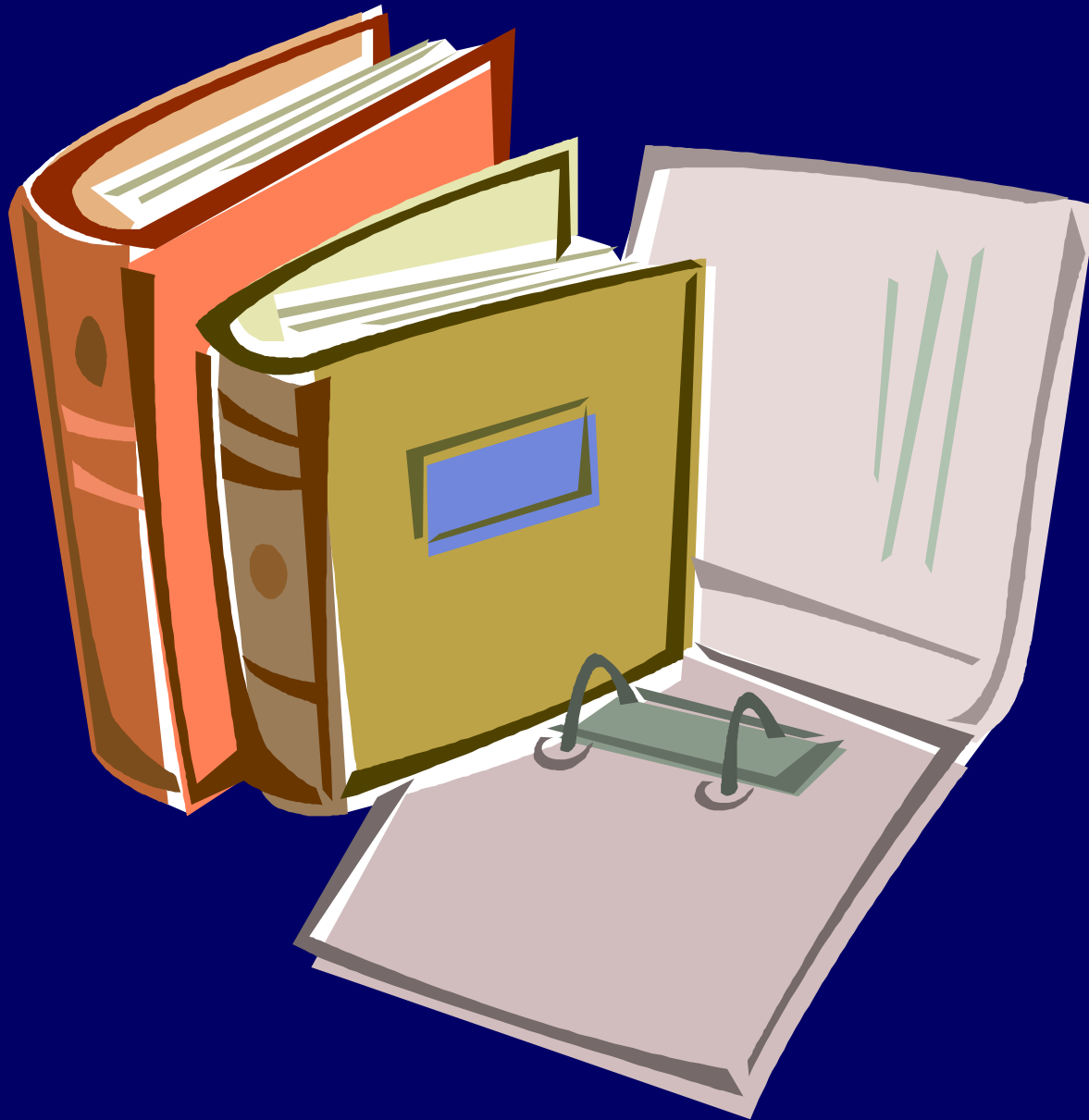
Can a piece of print material be
“literate”?



Can a piece of print material be
“literate”?

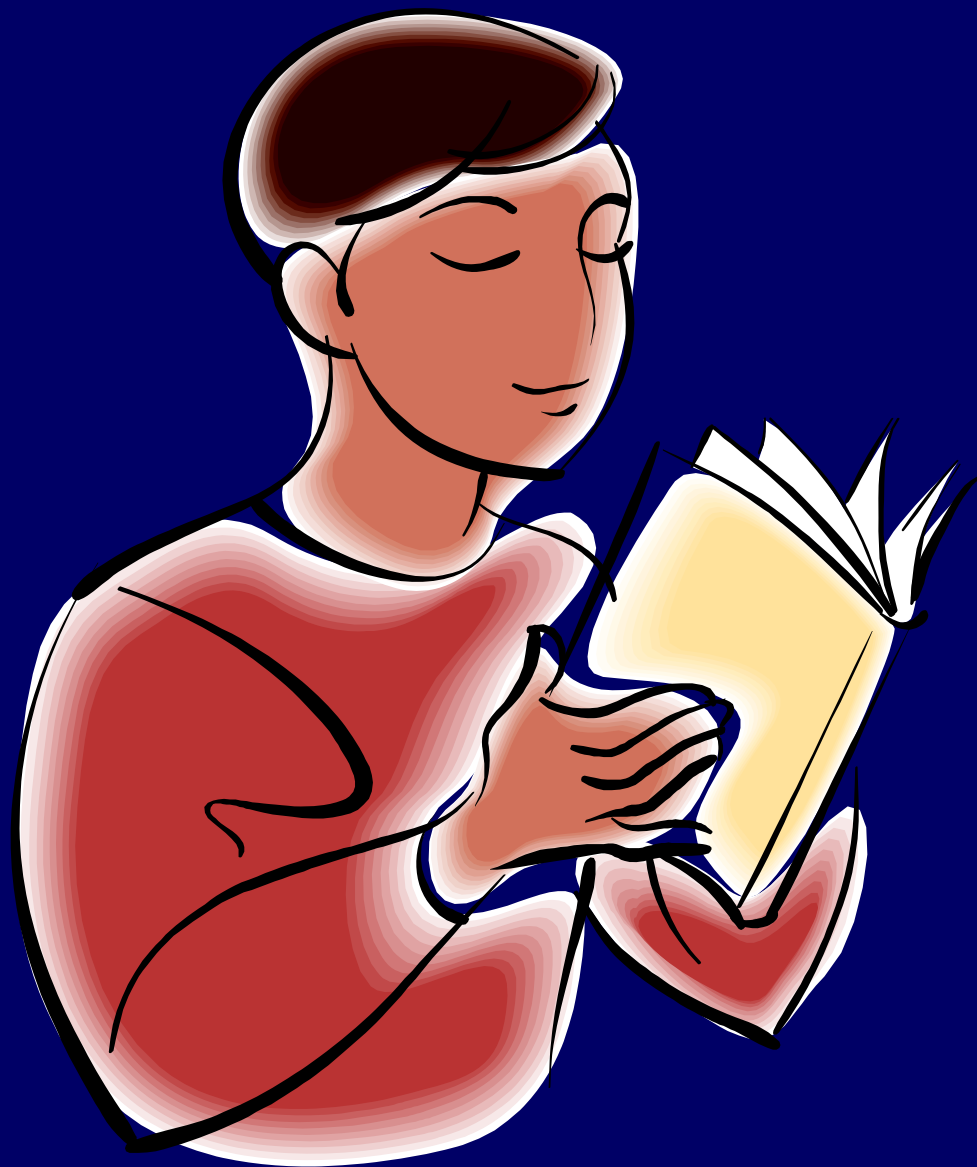
Can it be “*health literate*”?





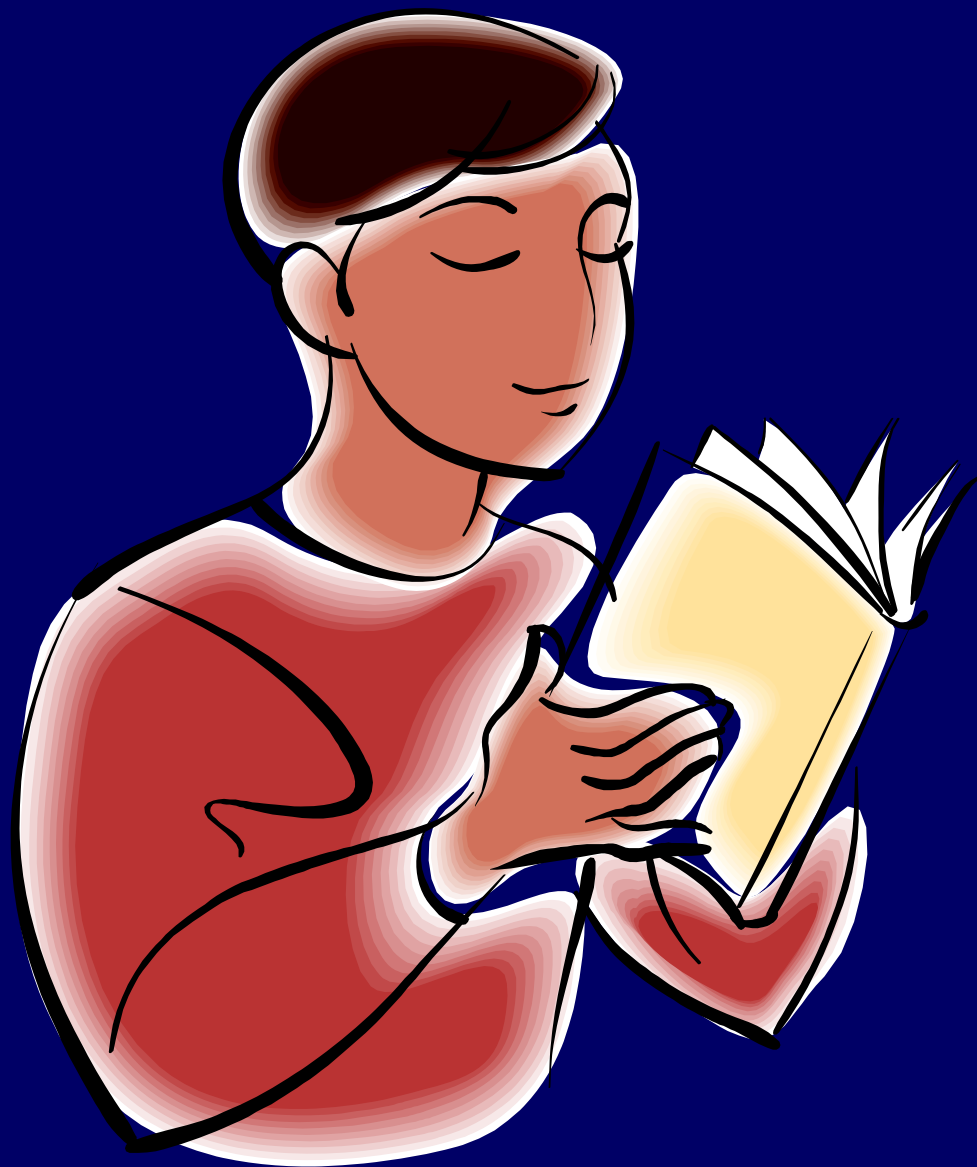
Material can be...

- Easy-to-read
- Reader-friendly
- Patient/Consumer-friendly
- Written in plain language



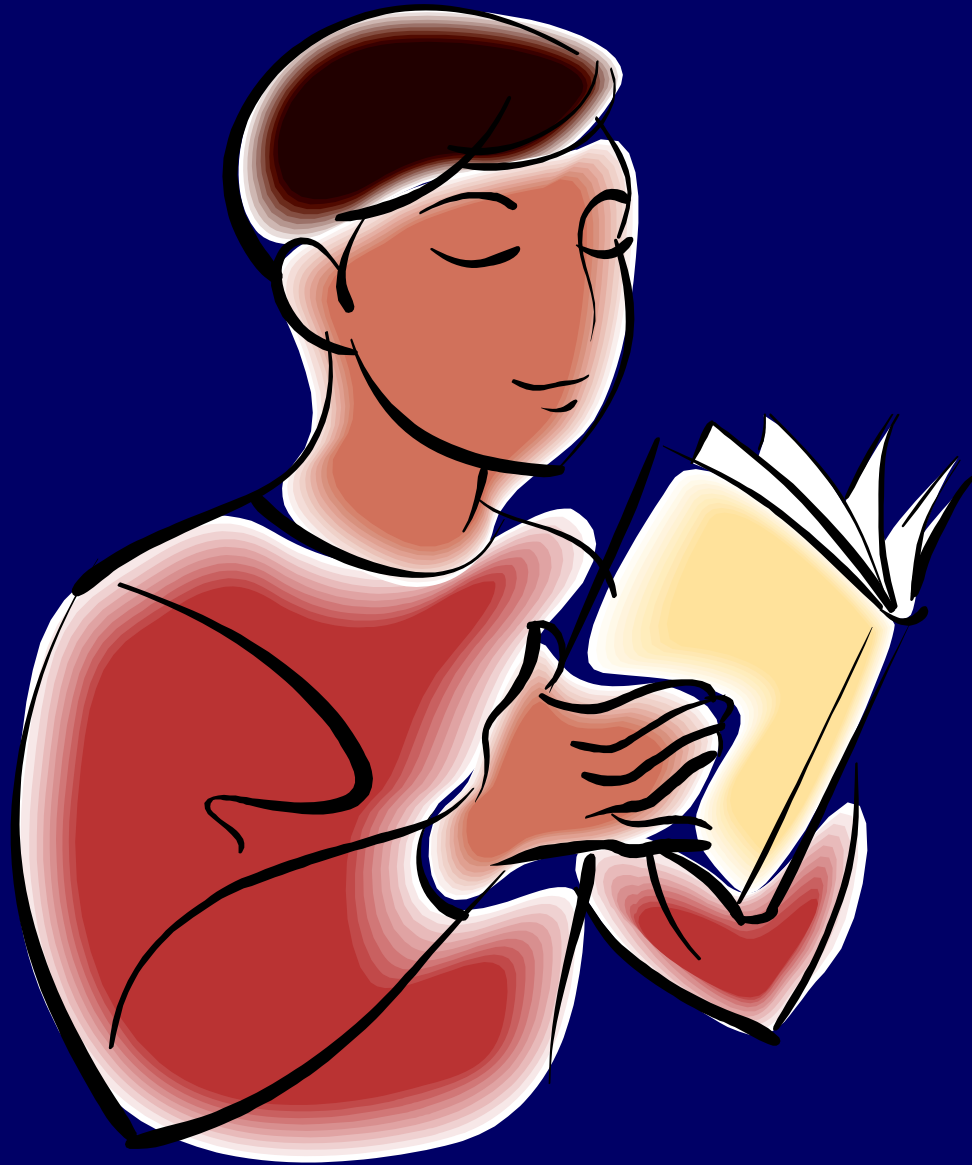
It is *people* who can be...

- “Literate”



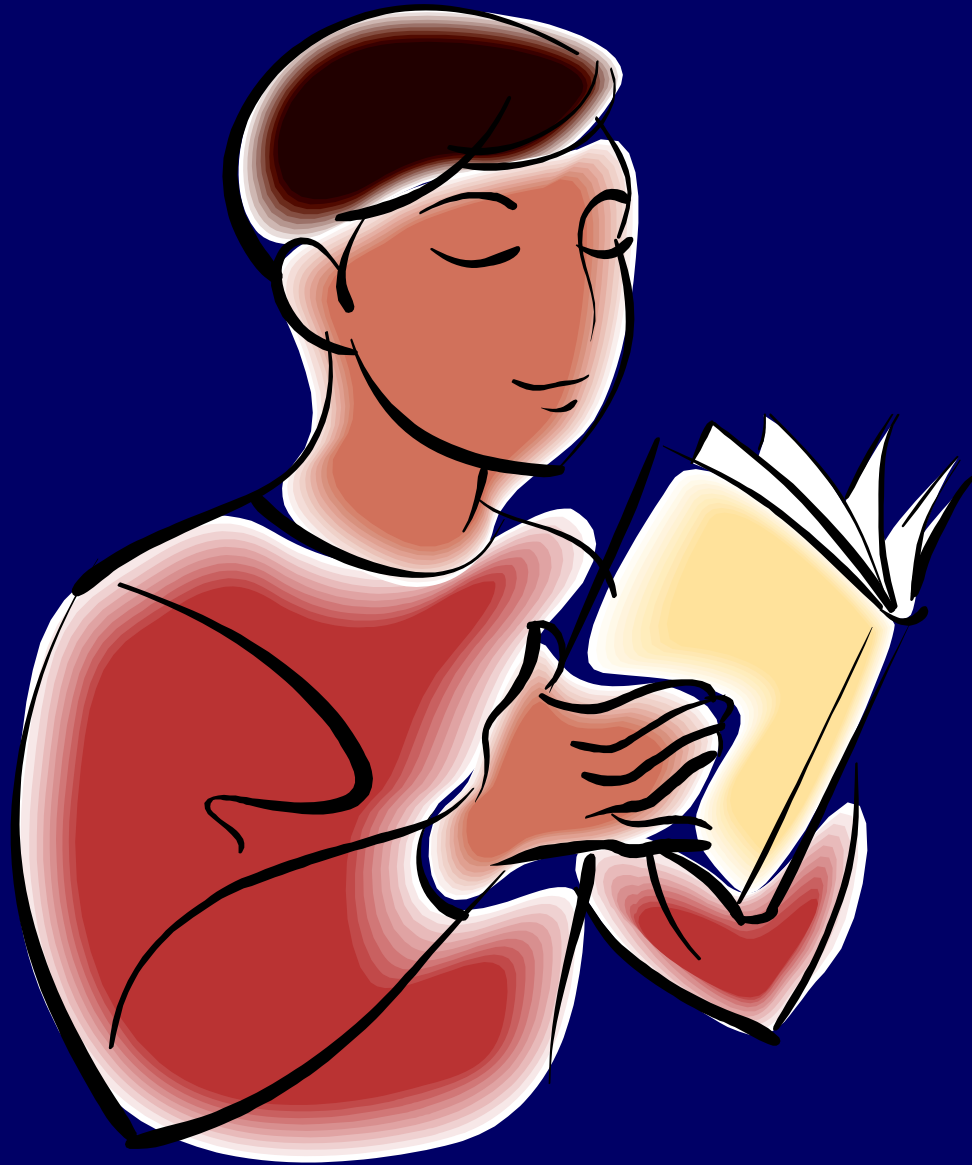
People can be...

- Literate
- Health Literate
- Illiterate (offensive)



People can be...

- Strong readers
- Marginal readers



Or, people can have...

- Adequate literacy skills
- Marginal literacy skills
- Inadequate literacy skills

Clarify Terminology – Issue C

A. Literacy vs. Health Literacy

B. Literate vs. Easy-to Read, Reader/Patient-Friendly

C. Health Literacy vs. Clear Health Communication

Clarify Terminology – Issue C

Health Literacy vs. Clear Health Communication?

- Consider which will be the easiest to understand
- Consider which will keep us focused on the *action* goal

Initial Issues, Challenges, Solutions

- Awareness
- Terminology
- Assessment

Common Myths

AMA: “You Can’t Tell by Looking”

People with marginal reading skills:

- are slow learners**
- have poor appearance**
- use broken English**
- have fewer years of schooling**
- don’t care**
- will admit reading problems**

How to Tell???

Clues

Patient may:

- Carry many papers around.
- **Fail to take medicine as prescribed.**
- Fail to know the name of a familiar medicine.
- **Fail to ask questions after “reading” materials.**
- Write with difficulty
- **Misspell words on forms that they fill**

How to Tell???

Clues

Patient may say:

- I forgot my glasses.
- **Could you fill this out for me?**
- I'll take this home for my husband to look at.

How to Tell???

Literacy and Health Literacy Testing

- **REALM (Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine)**
- **TOFHLA (Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults)**
- **The New Vital Sign**

RAPID ESTIMATE OF ADULT LITERACY IN MEDICINE (REALM)[®]

Terry Davis, PhD • Michael Crouch, MD • Sandy Long, PhD

Patient Name/
Subject # _____

Date of Birth _____

Reading
Level _____
Grade
Completed _____

List 1	List 2	List 3
fat _____	fatigue _____	allergic _____
flu _____	pelvic _____	menstrual _____
pill _____	jaundice _____	testicle _____
dose _____	infection _____	colitis _____
eye _____	exercise _____	emergency _____
stress _____	behavior _____	medication _____
smear _____	prescription _____	occupation _____
nerves _____	notify _____	sexually _____
germs _____	gallbladder _____	alcoholism _____
meals _____	calories _____	irritation _____
disease _____	depression _____	constipation _____
cancer _____	miscarriage _____	gonorrhea _____
caffeine _____	pregnancy _____	inflammatory _____
attack _____	arthritis _____	diabetes _____
kidney _____	nutrition _____	hepatitis _____
hormones _____	menopause _____	antibiotics _____
herpes _____	appendix _____	diagnosis _____
seizure _____	abnormal _____	potassium _____
bowel _____	sypilis _____	anemia _____
asthma _____	hemorrhoids _____	obesity _____
rectal _____	nausea _____	osteoporosis _____
incest _____	directed _____	impetigo _____

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup
Servings per container 4

Amount per serving

Calories 250 Fat Cal 120

%DV

Total Fat 13g 20%

Sat Fat 9g 40%

Cholesterol 28mg 12%

Sodium 55mg 2%

Total Carbohydrate 30g 12%

Dietary Fiber 2g

Sugars 23g

Protein 4g 8%

*Percentage Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Ingredients: Cream, Skim Milk, Liquid Sugar, Water, Egg Yolks, Brown Sugar, Milkfat, Peanut Oil, Sugar, Butter, Salt, Carrageenan, Vanilla Extract.

Assessing Literacy Skills

Literacy- Ability

- Inadequate Literacy Skills
- Marginal Literacy Skills
- Adequate Literacy Skills

Health Literacy

- Low Health Literacy

Literacy Testing

Considerations and Limitations

- **Should respond appropriately to the results**
- **Raises concerns re privacy and security**
- **Raises concerns re embarrassment**
- **May predict ability but not willingness**
- **Takes time that may not be available**
- **May have decreasing accuracy if patient takes same test on several occasions**

How to Tell???

AMA Foundation – Help Your Patients Understand

- **Design and use a short easy-to-read intake form**
 - 7 to 8 questions – some easy to read (5th grade) – some more difficult
 - Notice problems and offer help
 - Make it part of the routine (waiting room to provider's office)
- **Take a detailed social history**
 - Cultural background
 - What kind of work do you do?
 - How far did you go in school?
 - How happy are you with how you read?
- **Conduct a brown bag medication review**
 - Show me how you're supposed to take these medicines
 - How did you get from your doctor's writing the prescription to knowing what comes out of the bottle? (Colors? Shapes?)

Assessing Readability of Materials

- **Fry**
- **SMOG**

- **Flesch-Kincaid**
- **Micro Power and Light**
- **Fryinator**
- **Health Literacy Innovations**

Assessing Readability of Materials

Advantages

- **Quick and easy to use**
- **Provide some tangible measure**
- **Screen materials for general difficulty**
- **Remind writers to choose words carefully**
- **Can supplement, but don't replace the need to field test**

Assessing Readability of Materials

Limitations

They do not measure:

- **The influence of layout, design or illustrations**
- **The influence of length or concept density**
- **Clarity of the intended messages**
- **Sensitivity to culture and diverse perspectives**
- **Credibility or believability**