

PREVENTION LINK

of Southern Maryland
www.preventionlinkmd.com

Volume 1. Issue 6. October 2022



Health Literacy Month

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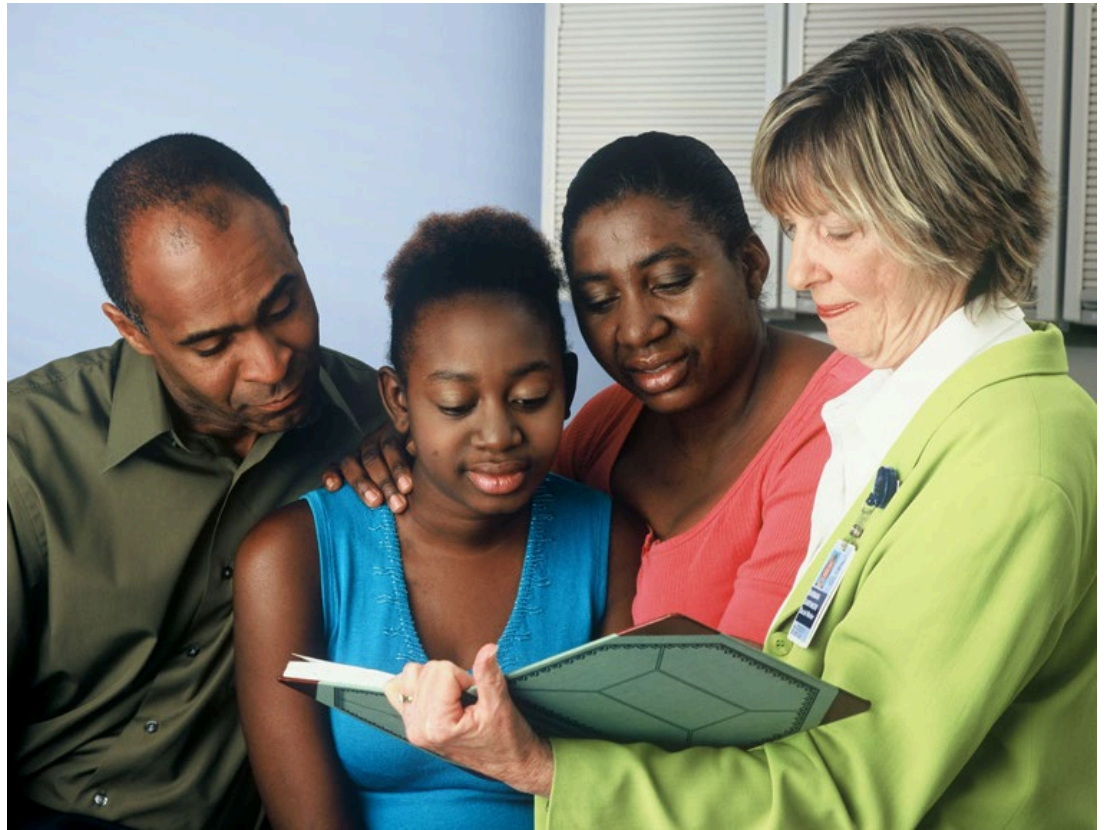
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Health Literacy Month



October is Health Literacy Month, and we are excited about this opportunity to help Southern Maryland residents obtain, process, and understand the basic health information and services needed to make informed healthcare decisions. A lack of health literacy can lead to poorer health outcomes, including increased hospitalization and mortality.

According to the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health](#), nine out of 10 U.S. adults have limited health literacy skills, which impedes their ability to manage their health and make informed health decisions. This is especially true for people living in disadvantaged communities, who often face greater barriers to accessing quality healthcare.

In celebration of Health Literacy Month, we are increasing awareness across our platforms. We are highlighting the importance of health literacy and how it can improve the overall quality of care.

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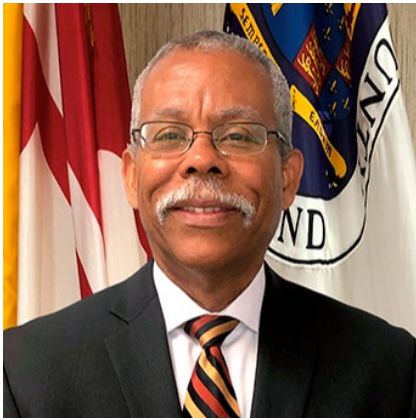
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Dr. Carter's Corner

A message from our Principal Investigator



Dear colleagues,

As we enter into Health Literacy Month, I wanted to reach out and provide you with some tips on how you can encourage health literacy in your practices. [Low health literacy](#) can lead to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

By ensuring that your patients can understand and manage their chronic conditions, you can help prevent and manage these diseases.

Here are a few tips to help improve health literacy in your practice:

1. Stay focused on prevention by helping your patients understand their diagnosis and treatment plans using plain language and avoiding medical jargon.
2. Get involved in local coalitions. PreventionLink provides an excellent forum for sharing information and collaborating with others working to prevent chronic diseases. Many of these forums have resources such as patient handouts or websites that patients can use to learn more about their condition.
3. Connect patients with resources outside the doctor's office, such as community health centers or patient education programs. These resources can provide additional support and help patients stay on track with their treatment plans.

We also wanted to highlight some recent successes in our program. Our most recent pilot, Medication Therapy Management, has been a resounding success, and we will be onboarding more practices in the next few months. If you have not yet looked at the service, now might be a good time to help ensure that your patients adhere to their medication regimes.

We have made great strides in prevention, but we still have a long way to go. Although I have only highlighted one success, many more are to come. I am confident in your ability to continue this important work. Together, we can prevent chronic diseases from claiming more lives in Southern Maryland. Thank you for your dedication.



Interview with Angela Deal, Community Health Educator

For Health Literacy Month, the University of Maryland Horowitz Center for Health Literacy at the School of Public Health and the Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) are cosponsoring the Health Literacy in Action Conference from October 13 to 14. The conference is open to the medical community and promises to provide tools, tips, and skills that attendees can use when they return to work.

The conference will include several leaders in the field of health literacy, such as Angela Deal, an experienced community health educator from the Charles County Department of Health.

PreventionLink had an opportunity to speak with Deal about her groundbreaking work on a recent National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP) pilot. The partnership approach she undertook was unprecedented and may be key to future prevention efforts.

About the Pilot

Funding: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Problem: Recruitment and retention

Recruiting and retaining participants in diabetes prevention programs has been a major issue for years.

To help solve this problem, the CDC funded organizations offering partner sessions through NDPP lifestyle change programs (LCP).

Participation requirements: To participate in this study, one party had to meet the eligibility requirements for NDPP LCP enrollment.

Q & A with Angela Deal

[How did you incorporate a family-friendly approach into the pilot?](#)

We ran the NDPP program just as we normally would but placed more emphasis on working together with your partner. We encouraged them [participants] to shop, cook, and participate in physical activity together.

[What has been the reaction to this approach so far?](#)

We have received an overwhelmingly positive response. As long as the pairs selected the right partner, they successfully met their goals.

As I am sure you have all heard by now, there will be some great speakers at the conference providing more insight into this important topic. Two leaders worth looking out for at the conference are Dr. Alice Horowitz, a former senior scientist who has been recognized for her work in numerous peer-reviewed publications, and Cynthia Baur, Ph.D., who led the CDC's health literacy and plain language work. She was also the health communication lead at the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

[To learn more, register for the conference using the details that follow \(page 8\).](#)

What are the benefits of using a family-friendly approach when implementing LCPs?

"The paired approach created excellent opportunities for these partners to get closer.... They went to different parks. They joined gyms together. They cooked meals together. They hadn't done these things before, but they really spent quality time... meal prepping, planning, shopping, cooking—the whole nine yards."

How to Integrate Health Literacy into Your Practice



Sharing and disseminating information about health literacy to improve lives

As a provider, one of your primary objectives is to ensure that your patients understand and follow your instructions. This can be difficult when patients have low health literacy. According to [the National Institutes of Health, only 12% of the US population has proficient health literacy](#). In other words...



Health literacy is a complex issue, but there are simple steps you can take to make sure your patients get the information they need. By taking the time to assess their health literacy levels and communicate with them in plain language, you can help them better understand their conditions and follow your recommendations.

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Step One: Assess

Assessing a patient's health literacy level is one of the first steps in gauging their understanding. The following are a few tools you can use:

- [The Newest Vital Sign](#) is a six-item questionnaire that assesses both functional and interactive health literacy skills. It covers reading ability, numeracy skills, and the ability to find and understand medical information.
- [The Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults \(TOFHLA\)](#) is a simple and widely used 33-item test that measures reading comprehension and numeracy skills.

Whichever assessment tool you choose, it's important to administer it at regular intervals (at least once a year) so that you can track any changes in patients' health literacy levels over time.

Step Two: Communicate at their level

Once you've determined a patient's health literacy, it's important to communicate with them at their level, especially with patients with low health literacy. There are several things you can do to ensure they're getting the information they need:

- **Use plain language:** When communicating with patients, always use clear and concise language. Avoid technical terms or jargon whenever possible. Instead of saying "The results of your MRI show evidence of a rotator cuff tear," try "Your MRI showed that you have a tear in your shoulder muscle."
- **Repeat yourself:** When explaining something important, don't be afraid to repeat yourself or provide additional examples. Research shows that repetition helps improve comprehension, especially for people with low health literacy levels.
- **Write things down:** In addition to a verbal explanation, provide written materials (such as handouts or leaflets) that summarize key points or instructions. You can also consider providing audio or video materials and directing your patients to helpful websites like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if possible.

Health Literacy Tools and Resources for Providers

Various sources have information about health literacy, including professional organizations, journals, and online resources. The Horowitz Center for Health Literacy at the University of Maryland is an invaluable local resource, as is the [Health Literacy Out Loud](#) podcast. There are also many other health literacy podcasts and websites. The CDC's website includes fact sheets on health literacy, patient education materials, and training modules on improving patient communication.



Upgrade Your Technology to Streamline Your Practice for Greater Efficiency and Profitability



In today's digital age, many providers are choosing to go paperless in their offices. One of the best ways to do this is integrating patient electronic medical records (EMRs) into practice management software, forming an all-in-one system. This allows you to manage patients' medical information, appointments, billing, and other office functions all in one place to easily find and track patient information. This can expedite the appointment process and improve overall patient care.

Another big benefit is cost reduction. An integrated system usually has built-in features that automate common tasks, such as billing and insurance claim processing, and save you valuable time and money.

Finally, using an integrated system can improve communication between you and your patients. With online access to patients' medical records, you can better understand their health histories and provide more informed care.

Overall, there are many benefits to using an integrated practice management and EMR system. If you're considering switching to a paperless office, explore the available options for integrating these systems.

Calendar of Events

Health Literacy in *Action*



Virtual • October 13-14, 2022

Showcasing Practice and Policy ideas to advance health literacy and health equity.

Registration is open • www.hlactionconf.com

Horowitz Center for Health Literacy and IHA Institute for Healthcare Advancement
Virtually, October 13 – 14, 2022

Visit [Health Literacy in Action](https://hlactionconf.com/) at <https://hlactionconf.com/> to learn more and sign up.