

Health and Literacy Curriculum:

A LEARNING INSTITUTE

October 16-18, 2008

Calgary, AB

The issues in this hand-out were named by participants in a personal profile they each sent in before the Institute. Facilitator Linda Shohet grouped them into categories to share with everyone at the start of the first day. We returned to them briefly at the end of the Institute to ask what had been addressed and what issues or questions might need to be reconsidered in the light of what we had learned. The degree of repetition reflects the common interests shared by attendees, despite coming from very different sectors.

Issues

Identifying models of curriculum

- I'd like to see what consumer targeted health literacy programs are available and how successful they have been.
- Are curricular requirements for graduate medical education (or mandates from the Joint Commission, etc.) regarding health communication being used to promote large-scale health literacy training at an institutional level anywhere?
- What, if anything, do current medical education guidelines say about the need to integrate health literacy training into curricula?
- How to integrate health literacy principles into existing curricular elements within a crowded medical school curriculum?
- What does a comprehensive curriculum in health literacy for medical students look like?
- Where would health literacy be included in nursing programs, e.g. would it fall under "communication" and would time be devoted to this topic?
- Interested in developing curriculum for our training team to use and integrated into our tutor training session for our volunteer tutors to use with their adult learners and to share throughout Ontario via Laubach Literacy Ontario and their Training and Accreditation Committee
- I am interested in hearing about how others have incorporated the concepts of health literacy into curriculum and practice as well as hearing Dr. Pleasant and learning about the resources he has identified. I believe health literacy is a key component in meeting the health care challenges of the 21st century and assisting citizens to become more knowledgeable about their own health, to take

responsibility for their health status and to become true partners in care when required.

- What is the core content for health literacy curriculum for health providers, teachers, and others? What are some teaching strategies and activities others have used and have found useful in supporting learning?
- Also, I am looking forward to seeing the tools that have already been developed by other literacy organizations – we don't need to re-invent the wheel.
- I would like to learn about what has already been developed. I hope to take away from the conference material that will be helpful to my project.
- Access to effective content/materials
- High quality courses– what meets health care needs and educational rigors
- Cultural (western) ways of education
- How do we build a long-term solution to low literacy in the area of health since a single workshop, learning to read the label on a Tylenol bottle, learning to search the internet for a family doctor, reading the side-effects in a pharmacy print-out, none of these one-time skill-building exercises, will have any long-term use to patients?
- Creation of individualized health workshops for individuals of a specific literacy level, specific learning style, etc... including collaborative learning, involving learner/patient input into curriculum design.

Collaboration

- A collaborative community approach to developing health literacy seems to empower communities to some degree to become more actively engaged in preventative health care. For the health service providers, focusing upon developing health literacy through a participatory approach heightens their awareness of the community's cultural and economic context, literacy levels and gaps in knowledge related to various health processes thereby changing their methods of health education.
- How can we develop links with health educators to bring information about health literacy to new and experienced coordinators of community literacy programs in a way that complements the work they are already doing?
- What are the trends in health literacy, unmet needs, and opportunities for collaboration?
- I'm looking for suggestions on how to approach and engage members of the health profession.

- My big issue is collaborations between the health and literacy fields (and other related fields). I'd like to see us address the culture gap between the health and literacy fields, and explore how to get these two fields to be able to collaborate more easily. It works so well when it happens, but is so hard to do!
- Issue #4 of *Literacies* focussed on health and wellness and we collaborated with the Canadian Public Health Association who were holding a literacy conference that fall (2004) on our web forum. It was a great opportunity for literacy workers and health care workers to tackle questions like this together and I look forward to another fruitful conversation.
- How to link training strategies and activities to service delivery – i.e. bringing educational and health institutions together
- Literacy Volunteers of Quebec has just started advocating on behalf of health literacy and is hoping to fund a conference for health and social service workers. Information obtained at the Institute will go toward informing the conference organization.
- Health literacy curriculum needs to be delivered in 2 ways: Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies need to integrate health topics into their literacy programming and health care providers need to adopt teaching strategies that incorporate adult-ed principles geared to those at the very lowest levels of literacy. Ideally, cooperative curriculum development on both of these projects would be required. Where is the money coming from? Who delivers what and when? Is there a way to refer clients from health care to literacy?
- Working in isolation, health professionals and literacy agencies will have difficulty making a difference. Health literacy enhanced by health professionals will need to be reinforced by upgrading general literacy skills so that skill attrition does not take place.

Selling HL/Getting buy-in

- Making the argument for more professional education on health literacy. How have others “sold” the concept to administrators, particularly at large institutions?
- What have attempts at faculty development in the area of health literacy looked like at other institutions? Again, how to “sell” the concept?
- I want to explore how to “sell” the expertise of literacy teachers and students to the health community as a valuable resource for addressing health literacy and communication from the health providers’ side of the equation. Teachers and students should be involved in many aspects of training health professionals and adapting health systems.

- Convincing and training providers to integrate
- Access to evaluative information about the effectiveness of integrating health literacy curriculum in order to promote a broader acceptance and use
- I'm interested in learning more about getting "buy in" about health literacy from the people for whom curriculum is created (from health care providers to low literate populations).
- Information to support the importance of health literacy within the newly formed Alberta Health Services. At this time, no policy/support exists regarding health literacy and plain language.
- How to get people to take action
- What needs to be done? Who can do it? How can we move forward productively?

Serving diverse populations

- Ensuring the programs are out in the community and that health professionals are not only aware of the issues but are respectful in facilitating health literacy within their clientele.
- Integrating participatory approach to developing levels of health literacy on various health topics among other low literacy populations from diverse cultural backgrounds as an essential aspect of public health education. To date, I have helped to integrate health literacy programs into ESL classes though not into mainstream public health programs where it should also be.
- Want to promote literacy and health in our community as our area has higher than provincial averages of literacy issues and an aging population
- Increasingly diverse student demographic – language, culture, age, educational background and employment experience
- The major concern that I have is related to balancing practicality and further opportunities for academic study for my students. The students need a format where they can receive academic course material at a literary level they can comprehend in order to succeed. They need to have the basic background fundamentals to then respond to the material and be accurately evaluated
- How can we study health literacy among our diverse population at BVC?
- I'm interested in learning about what educational strategies work best for teaching health literacy skills to different populations.

- The reality is that within the health sector there are workers who struggle with reading and writing and culturally different ways of communicating. We need to deepen our understanding of the multiplicity of literacies within the health sector.

System issues

- The culture of the health care system and its influence on health literacy
- How to provide busy health professionals with tools/information that is actionable, makes a difference for the patients they service, and fits into the work flow.
- I would like us to look at approaches that lead to systematic change; breaking down the silos between health and literacy. The discussion around issues and concerns needs to get to a deeper level than talk about plan language or the appalling literacy statistics.
- How do we address resistance to learning about health literacy among some health care providers, including medical students and residents?
- I am interested in the ways that a curriculum is researched and developed, especially in a field such as health where power and privilege can play a role in determining who gets to ask, who gets answered and how.
- Working with literacy learners upgrading their skills in order to train for health care jobs raised a number of questions for me around whether what is expected of them as students reflects what is expected of them as workers, especially considering that their return on their investment of time, energy and money can be quite minimal.
- The ways that I and others in my community experience the health care system provide interesting insights into how scientific research and professional language can be used to enlighten or frighten, reassure or confuse. Often, in order to learn about a condition, find out about treatment options, make a decision about treatment and understand aftercare calls upon the full capacity of our literacy and critical thinking skills.

Building awareness

- How to build awareness amongst colleagues that health literacy goes far beyond 'how to check the reading level of a pamphlet' and how to build support addressing health literacy within the curriculum

- Ensuring the programs are out in the community and that health professionals are not only aware of the issues but are respectful in facilitating health literacy within their clientele.
- For the health service providers, focusing upon developing health literacy through a participatory approach heightens their awareness of the community's cultural and economic context, literacy levels and gaps in knowledge related to various health processes thereby changing their methods of health education.
- Want to promote literacy and health to our local health care professionals
- I would like to see our health professionals understand how to begin a discussion with patients who have literacy issues: how to begin a comfortable discussion on subject, to pass on information about free programs available, to have information on hand, to ask how it is going during subsequent visits. I would like health professionals to believe this is part of their job in providing health care.
- After having surveyed 10 practitioners in my community regarding their impressions of their patient's literacy levels, practitioners (at all levels) are ill-aware of the marginal universal literacy levels of their patients and more importantly, how that translates into very low essential skill levels with regards to health materials. How do we inform more health professionals and invite them to become advocates? Conference tours? Advocacy packages? Direct information to health care assistants?

Health literacy/communication

- Increasing inter-professional communication
- In a society that prioritizes communication through text (paper/electronic) over person to person, I am concerned that along with not meeting the health information and service needs of adults that struggle with printed text, health practitioners have little opportunity to critically reflect on their communication methods. I also believe that this lack of serious attention to questioning the dominant communication methods (dominant/official language, professional jargon, printed text) perpetuates an us-and-them approach.
- Accessibility of health literacy information. How to communicate complicated health information in a clear way to patients who may have lower literacy levels in English or French, or who are learning English as an Additional Language.

Definitions

- The difference between limited literacy and limited language proficiency (e.g. limited English or French)
- I am very interested in the question of what we are talking about when we say ‘health literacy’. It seems to mean so many different things.
- How health literacy initiatives build the general literacy of individuals

Assessment

- Assessment of health literacy—the ability to obtain and understand information—written and numeric—is increasingly an important clinical measurement as low health literacy is associated with less knowledge of disease, lower quality of life, poorer health outcomes, and higher hospitalization rates. We are setting up a research project to test of the reliability of a modified TOFHLA (Canadian version) in a population of elderly adults, to assess the prevalence of health literacy levels, which will provide a base-line for future interventions.
- Little or no screening is done for literacy levels of patients to determine whether educational materials are written at an appropriate level (Levels are too high despite the use of clear language) The 2 primary tools (TOFHL-Test of functional health literacy and REALM-rapid estimate of adult literacy in medicine) take over an hour to administer and one of them does not assess numeracy. Neither covers problem solving skills, verbal communication or skills beyond reading text and basic comprehension. PDQ (available at www.ets.org has a fairly quick health literacy assessment but it is American (deals with American HMO’s, access etc), is computer based and requires a measure of computer literacy to complete. What short comprehensive screening tool is available that will be embraced by the health care community as effective, efficient and task oriented? How do literacy providers target health materials as subject areas of risk for their learners?

Research

- Literacy funding is primarily focused on academic or workplace upgrading as various levels of government have determined that the best economic return comes from getting people back to work. More research is needed in linking literacy to health care costs in an effort to see similar focus on health literacy as we have seen on workplace literacy.
- Recent reviews of health literacy initiatives in Canada have turned up many promising practices, but little “best practice” because there are so many pilot projects and so little evaluation. The recent Expert Panel report from CPHA/CCL

called for more action-research with evaluation to test some of the many hypotheses/assumptions we have about the outcomes of HL interventions. How do we move toward a more coherent research agenda and what kind of curriculum do we build when we lack a coherent theory?

Information questions

- Are there any tools I can use to assess comprehension of what I have discussed with a client?
- Where can I go for feedback on printed materials in English that I may create or modify for learners to ensure they are understandable?