

Tips for Engaging Patients With Low Health Literacy

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS: Joseph Sudano, PhD and Joseph Daprano, MD on behalf of Team Best Practices

How can we improve clinician-patient communication with lower literacy patients?

Nearly 36% of US adults have ‘basic’ or ‘below basic’ health literacy, and may lack the literacy skills needed to effectively manage their cardiovascular health.¹ These adults often have limited understanding of medical labels and instructions, are more likely to report their health as poor, and have higher mortality rates compared to adults with ‘proficient’ health literacy.² Adults who cannot read (or cannot read well) often rely on verbal sources of information, and may be reluctant to ask clarifying questions. This puts them at greater risk of poor health outcomes, including hypertension and diabetes control.³

To engage clinical teams on health literacy, Cardi-OH has developed this **interactive presentation**. Consider using this as a starting point at your next practice meeting. This presentation includes the below brief

[American Medical Association video](#).



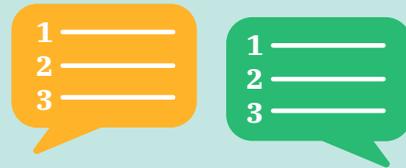
CITATIONS

1. Baker, D. W., Wolf, M. S., Feinglass, J., et. al. (2007). Health Literacy and Mortality Among Elderly Persons. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 167(14), 1503-1509. doi:10.1001/archinte.167.14.1503
2. Gazmararian, J. A., Williams, M. V., Peel, J., & Baker, D. W. (2003). Health literacy and knowledge of chronic disease. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 51(3), 267-275. doi:10.1016/S0738-3991(02)00239-2
3. Daprano, J. K. & Sudano, J.J. 2019. "Health Literacy: the Medical Imperative." Annual meeting of the Ohio

Consider these 3 strategies to engage patients with lower health literacy³:



- 1 Focus on key messages and repeat them verbally several times. Consider limiting to just 1-3 key messages per visit.



- 2 Use “teach back” techniques, asking patients to repeat in their own words what they need to know or do. This is to test how well **you** explained a concept.



- 3 Use appropriate educational materials to enhance interaction and serve as visual reminders. Choose patient handouts with clear graphics to depict instructions. Evaluate all written materials for appropriateness.

Additional information on social determinants of health is available at cardi-oh.org/best-practices/social-determinants-of-health. Follow [@cardi_OH](https://twitter.com/cardioh) on Twitter for additional cardiovascular health content.