



Health Literacy

Waterford Literacy Link

26 May 2011

[What is Health?]



- Health starts – long before illness – in our homes, schools and jobs
- Health begins where we live, learn, work and play



- Building health literacy skills and abilities is a life long process....No one is ever totally health literate.
- People develop health literacy over time and from a wide variety of sources

Why literacy is important for health

- The link between education and health (Ratzan 2001, Wilberforce 2005, Cavelaars et al 2000)
- The link between education & literacy and employment (Wils 2002, Cassen 2002)

[Six domains of influence]

- Education systems
- Media
- Home & community settings
- Workplaces
- The policy arena
- Healthcare systems



■ Education systems

- schools, formal & informal education
- developing & fostering literacy skills
- help children & adults learn about what influences their health, the impact of the choices they make and where to find reliable information to support decision making.

- Media:
shapes people's health perceptions, behaviours & choices

- TV, radio, online
- Newspapers, magazines
- Commercial advertising & marketing
- Social marketing



■ Home and Community Settings

- Family, peer groups and communities are primary sources of health information

○ Literacy practices in the home:



- Parents & family members reading newspapers and books regularly
- Parents reading to children from a very young age
- Having books for children in the home
- Being members of the local library



■ Workplace

- Employer/Employee communication – accident prevention, prevention of occupation related disease
- Access to adult education opportunities – computer literacy programmes
- Work-life balance, health promoting workplaces – move to wider understanding of health



- Policy making arenas

Shape social & structural factors that determine health literacy

- Free GP or Primary Care
- SPHE provision in primary & secondary schools

- Healthcare systems

[Irish research - literacy]

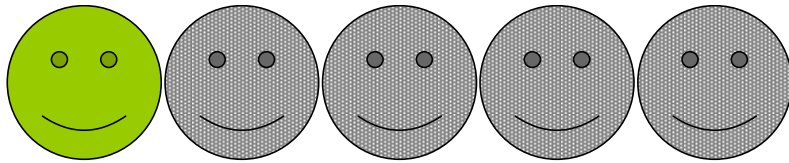


- IALS (1995)
 - Level 1 – 25%
 - Level 2 – 30%

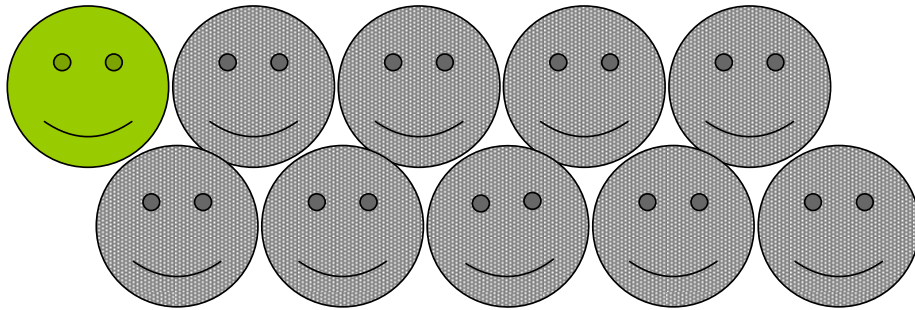
- PISA (2009)
 - Level 2 & below – 25% of 15 year olds

- Level 3 – considered the minimum to actively participate in society

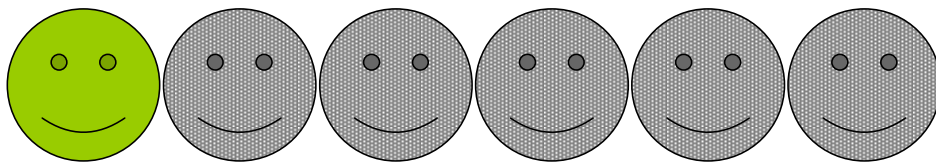
[Health literacy questionnaire]



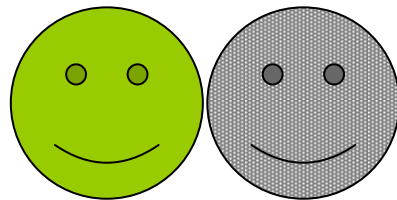
- do not feel fully confident when dealing with medical professionals;
- do not fully understand information and instructions on medication packets.



- Took the wrong dose of medication because they could not fully understand the directions



- Find filling in medical forms difficult or very difficult.



- If they did not understand something they would **only sometimes** ask for clarification

[Health literacy is:]

- The ability to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life – at home, in the community, at the workplace, the healthcare system, the market place and the political arena

(Kickbusch et al, 2005)

[Skills required:]

- Basic reading, writing & numeracy
- Ability to communicate & ask questions
- Recognise risk
- Sort through conflicting information
- Make health related decisions
- Navigate a complex health system
- 'speak up' for change

[Exercise – Ice cream label]

- **If you eat all the ice-cream in the container, how many calories will you eat?**

You are allowed to eat 60grams of carbohydrate as a snack a day.

- **How much ice-cream could you have in a day?**

[

You're advised to reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet. You usually have 42 grams of saturated fat each day, which includes one serving of ice-cream.]

- **If you stop eating ice-cream, how many grams of saturated fat would you be consuming each day?**



You usually eat 2500 calories in a day.

- **What percentage of your daily calories will you be eating if you eat only one serving?**
- **Is it safe for you to eat this ice-cream?**

[Types of literacy & healthcare]

Prose literacy →

Clinical example

Patient has an appointment for blood tests and is instructed in writing to fast the night before the test

Numeracy →

Clinical example

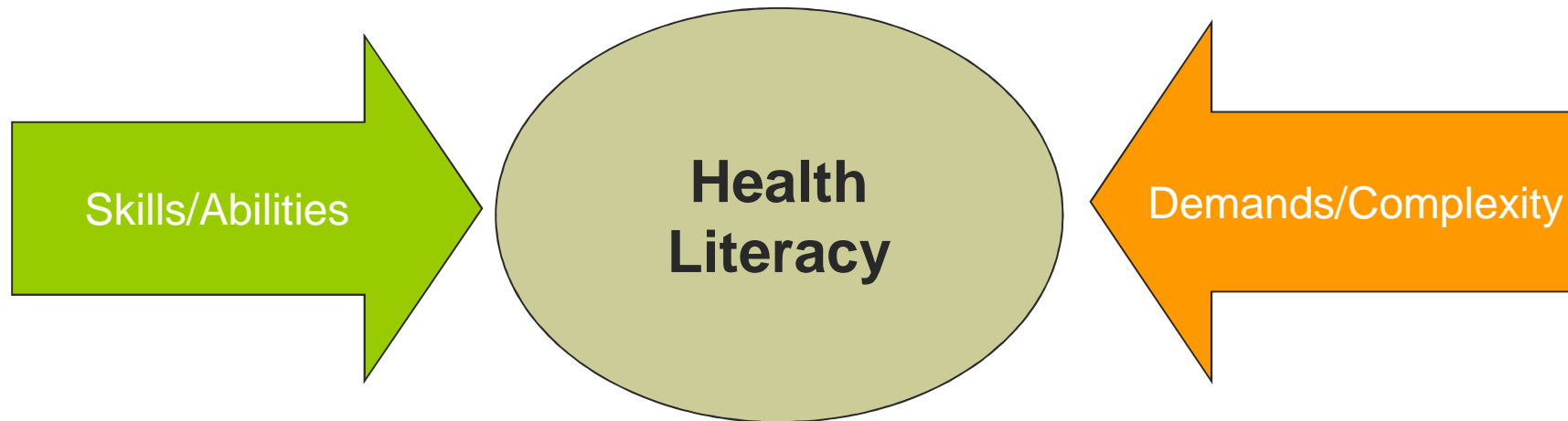
Patient is given a prescription for a new medication that needs to be taken at a certain dosage twice a day

Document literacy →

Clinical example

Patient is told to buy a glucose meter and use it 30 minutes before each meal and before going to bed. If the number is above a certain value they need to take medication

[In the healthcare system]



Health Literacy Framework – Parker R, in Hernandez 2009

[Abilities vs demands]

- Over 300 studies, in UK and US, demonstrate that printed materials are written in a language above the average reading ability for their populations.

This includes consent forms and web-based information sources

[Literacy friendly healthcare settings]

....actively measure, monitor, evaluate and adjust their communications to meet the needs and skills of their users.

Changes that individual health professionals can make

- Use methods such as teach back or Ask me 3
 - What is my main problem?
 - What do I need to do?
 - Why is it important for me to do this?
- Use visual aids
- Treat all patients the same

Changes that can be made at practice or service level

- Use the Literacy Audit for Healthcare Settings to:
 - look at the environment and how services are delivered
 - consider how literacy friendly they are
 - identify actions that could make it more literacy friendly

Examples of best practice in healthcare settings

- Expert Diabetes Management Programme
- Reviewing existing information and producing more literacy friendly materials – involving patients in the process of developing them
- Encouraging young people to access Primary Care for preventive services & antenatal care

Examples of best practice in the community setting

- Bag of books – National Libraries Initiative with Public Health Nurses
- Child Safety Awareness Programme
- Cook It
- Healthy Weight : Healthy Liverpool strategy

Resources available from HSE to support your work

- Training in how to apply Plain English techniques when producing information and guidance in Style Guide
- A range of literacy proofed information materials available on www.healthpromotion.ie
- Health Promotion training such as:
 - Brief interventions
 - Skills for health
 - Introduction to facilitation skills
 - Quit for youth
- Resources to support delivery of Community Health workshops
- Social marketing campaigns & resources such as
 - New QUIT campaign
 - Websites – www.littlesteps.eu, www.breastfeeding.ie, www.yoursexualhealth.ie