



## Five Promising Health Literacy Practices

### 1. A team effort, beginning at the front desk

- ✚ front desk and triage personnel play a vital role in setting a positive tone
- ✚ always offer to help complete forms
- ✚ simplify registration forms
- ✚ only ask for information that is needed
- ✚ attitude of helpfulness
- ✚ Ask Me 3 (English/Spanish/Hmong) and AMA posters

### 2. Use plain language, face-to-face communication

- ✚ slow down
- ✚ use plain, non-medical language
- ✚ limit the amount of information provided
- ✚ repeat it
- ✚ create a shame-free environment

### 3. Use standardized communication tools

- ✚ clinicians who use Teach Back, Ask Me 3 or Motivational Interviewing report positive results
- ✚ no more than one or two instructions at a time—and check each time: “Chunks and Checks” repeat it
- ✚ write it down
- ✚ use models, sketches, pictures
- ✚ give instructions to several family members
- ✚ consider follow-up phone calls

#### 4. Clinicians partner with patients to achieve goals

Institute a mechanism for verifying whether patients understand their treatment plans, prescriptions and dosing; patients who understand may:

- ✚ be more compliant with instructions and medications
- ✚ call back less often
- ✚ visit less often
- ✚ have fewer hospitalizations
- ✚ have better health outcomes
- ✚ have increased patient satisfaction

Encouraging the patient's enrollment in adult learning programs

#### 5. Organizational commitment

Create an environment where health literacy is not assumed

- ✚ many level 1 people don't fit the stereotypes
  - » 75% born in USA
  - » 50% are white
  - » 40% hold full or part-time jobs
- ✚ education level is a poor surrogate for literacy skills
  - » 24% of Functionally Illiterate have completed high school
  - » 39% adults with a high school education had only basic reading skills and 13% had skills below basic (NAAL, 2003)

Five promising practices are recommendations from: S. E. Barrett, J. Sheen Puryear, and K. Westpheling, Health Literacy Practices in Primary Care Settings: Examples From the Field, The Commonwealth Fund, January 2008. Available at: [http://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/publications\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=645961](http://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/publications_show.htm?doc_id=645961).

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