



Health Literacy: What Is It and How Do We Address It?

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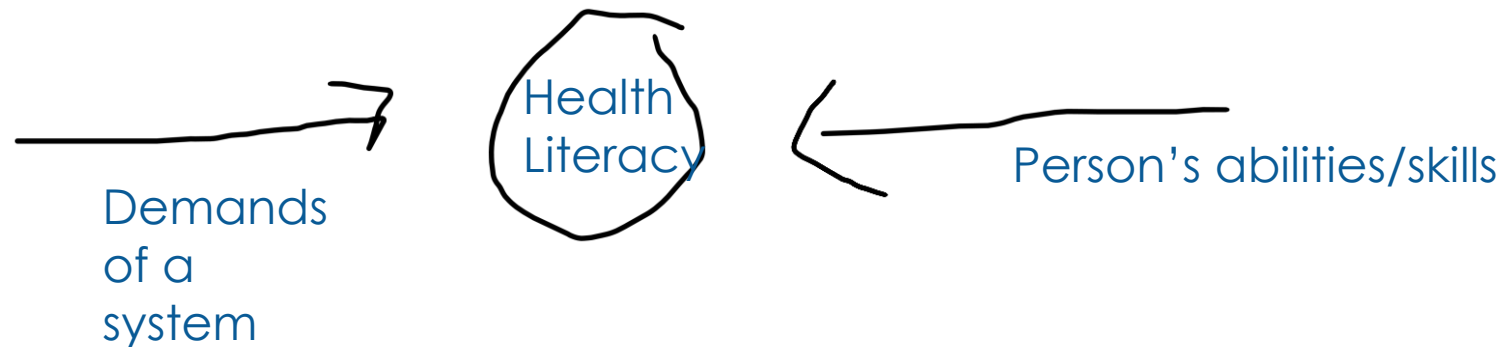


Objectives

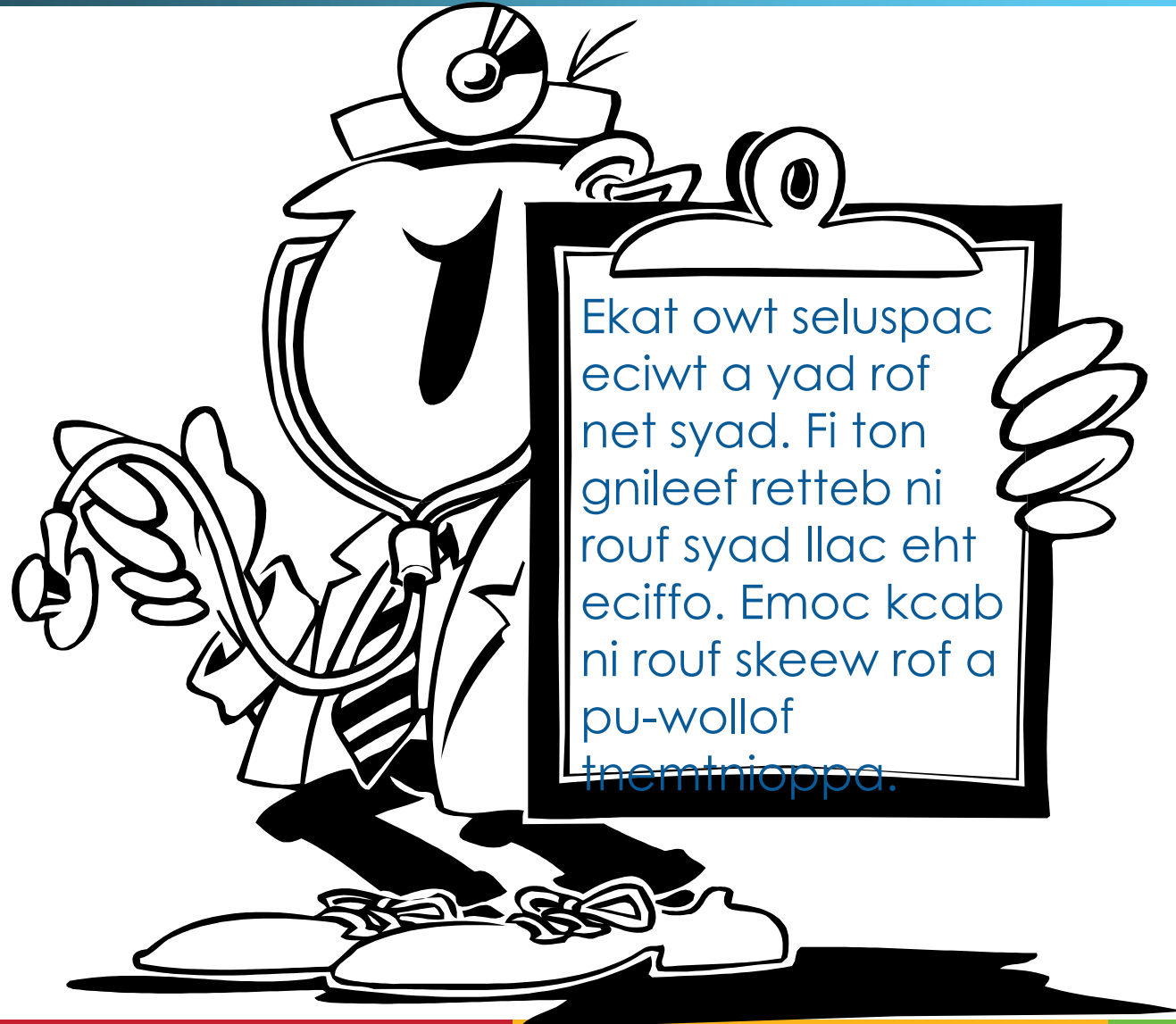
- By the end of this training, you will be able to:
 - Define what health literacy means
 - Recognize the affects health literacy has on health outcomes
 - Identify the “red flags” that signal an individual may have low literacy

Definition of Health Literacy

- The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.



What is it Like?



Ekat owt seluspac
eciwt a yad rof
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Factors Contributing to an Individual's Health Literacy

- General literacy
 - Ability to read and write
 - Ability to understand text and numbers
- Experience in the health care system
- Complexity of the information
- Cultural factors
- How the material is communicated

Types of Literacy

- Prose literacy
 - Editorials, news stories, brochures and instructional materials
- Document literacy
 - Job applications, payroll forms, drug and food labels
- Quantitative literacy
 - Balancing a checkbook, completing an order form, figuring a tip



Who is at risk?

- Everyone
- Over 36 percent of adults in the U.S. have low health literacy.
- Increase risk:
 - Older adults
 - Racial and ethnic minority populations
 - People of low socioeconomic status
 - Recent immigrants or other people with English as second language
 - Medically underserved people

Signs of Possible Lower Literacy Levels

- Patients often mask lower literacy levels due to feelings of inadequacies.
- Watch for:
 - Not completing forms
 - Medication adherence problems
 - Missing appointments
 - Over nodding of head with little verbal acknowledgement
 - Always accompanied by someone else
 - Not read in front of people

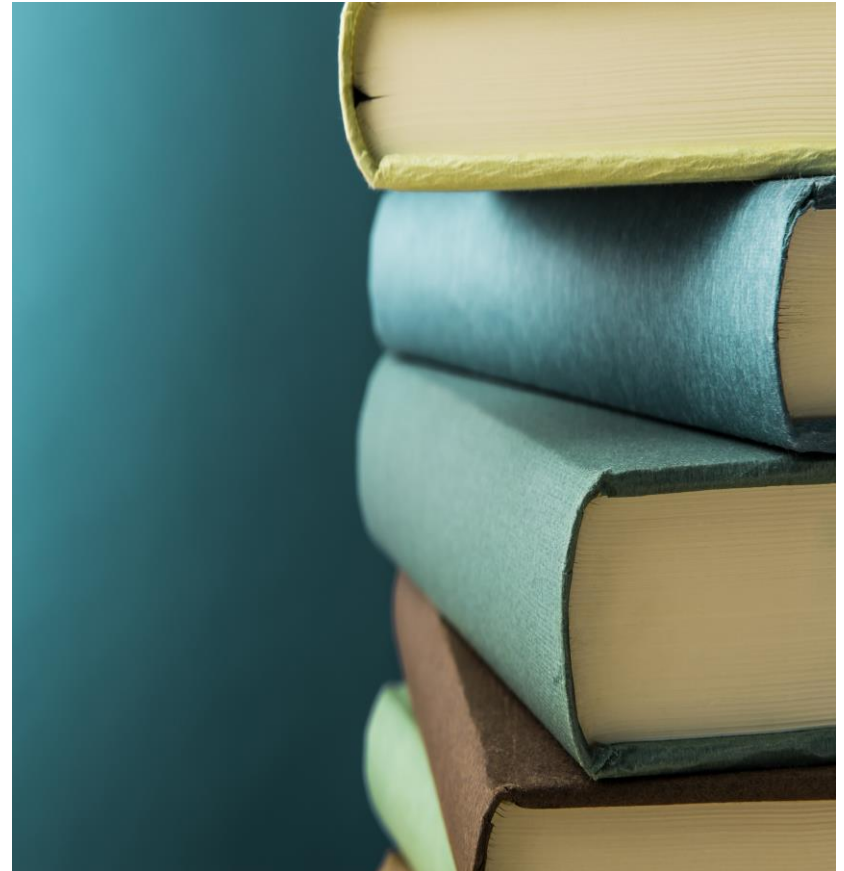


How does limited health literacy affect health outcomes?

HEALTH TASKS

USE OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES

HEALTH OUTCOMES



Health Tasks

- Clinical
 - Filling out a patient information form
 - Understanding dosing instructions for a med
 - Following recommendation for a diagnostic test
- Preventive
 - Following guidelines for preventive health services
 - Identifying signs and symptoms of health problems
 - Understanding how eating and exercise affect your health
- Navigation of health system
 - Understanding insurance coverage
 - Determining eligibility for assistance programs
 - Being able to give informed consent

Use of Healthcare Services

- Lower literacy level associated with...
 - Increased risk of hospitalization
 - Decreased screening
 - Decreased immunizations



Health Outcomes

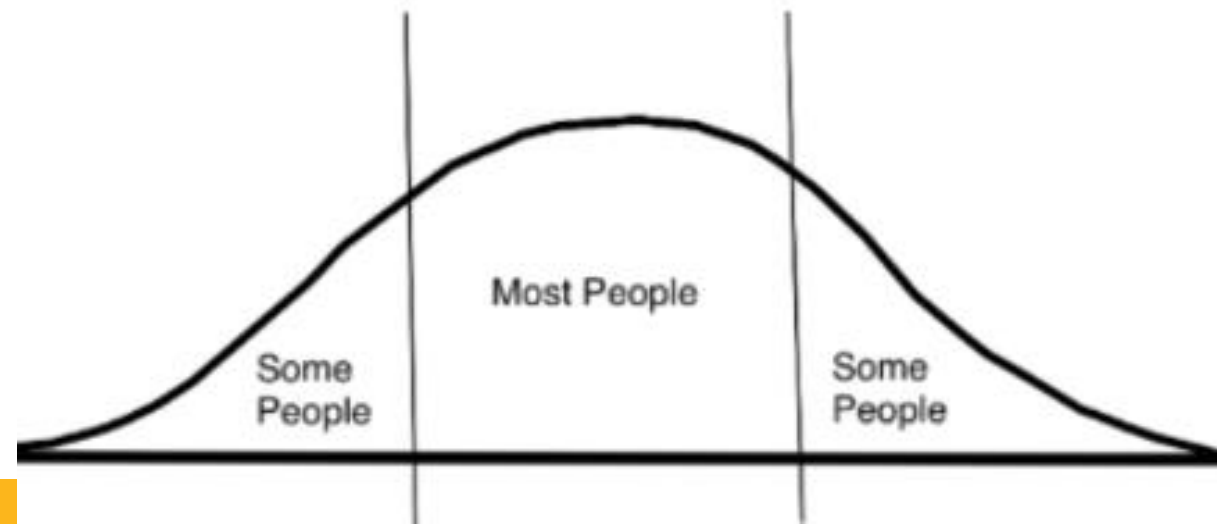
- Lower literacy skills associated with...
 - Smoking in adolescents
 - Alcohol use in adolescents
 - Problem behavior in children
 - Not Breastfeeding
 - Medication practice rate not aligned with recommendations

Universal Precautions Approach



Bases of the Universal Precautions Approach to Health Literacy

- Many people struggle with understanding medications, self-care, instructions, and follow-up plans
- Ensure systems are in place to promote better understanding for all clients, not just those you think need extra assistance
- Everyone benefits from simple language



Universal Precautions Takes an Organizational Commitment

- [AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd Edition](#)



DIRECT— Asking Patients About Literacy Skills

D – Ask about difficulty reading: “Have you ever had a problem with reading?”

I – Ask if the patient has an interest in improving: “Would you be interested in a program to help you improve your reading?”

R – Have referral information for adults and family literacy programs ready to give to those identified with reading difficulty.

E – Ask everyone about their literacy skills. Let patients know it is your policy to ask everyone.

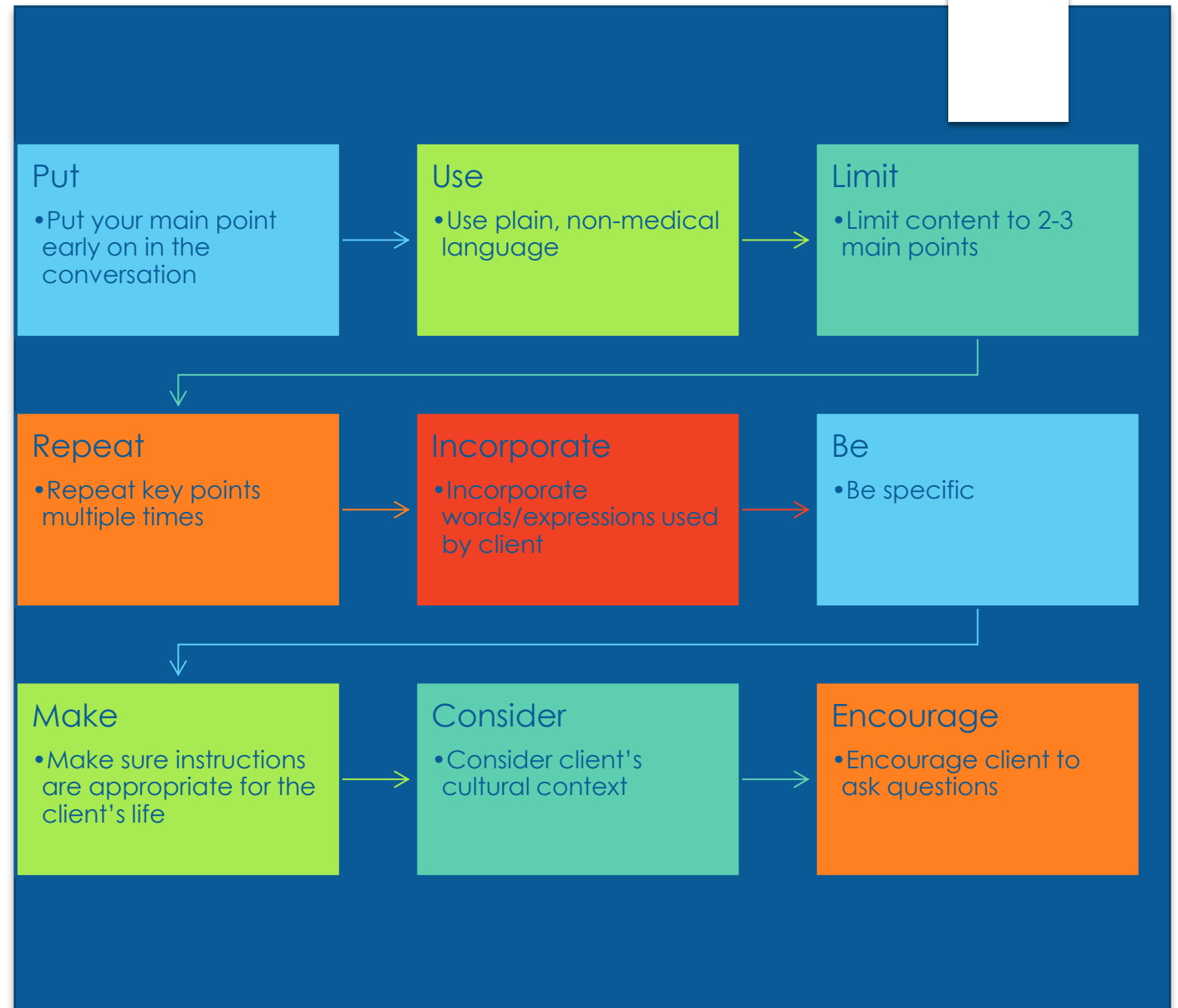
C – Emphasize that low literacy is a common problem and they are not alone: “Half of Americans have some difficulty reading.”

T – Take down barriers to joining literacy classes (e.g., help with the initial phone call, have informational sessions at the clinic, make follow up contact with patients to see if they were able to find the right class

A group of people are sitting in a circle, with their hands raised in the air. The scene is dimly lit, with a soft blue and grey color palette. The people are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire. The focus is on the hands and the collective gesture of raising them, which is a common activity in group therapy, workshops, or collaborative meetings. The text 'Spoken Language' is overlaid in the center-right of the image.

Spoken Language

General Strategies to Improve Spoken Communication



Talking to Clients/Patients

- Get into a conversational position
- Use plain, non-medical language
- SPEAK SLOWLY, watch for cues
- Show or draw pictures
- Limit the amount of information provided
- Reveal 2 or 3 concepts, then check for understanding.
“Chunk and Check”
- Sit rather than stand

Medical Terms Patients May Not Understand

Medical Term	Translation
Analgesic	Pain killer
Benign	Not cancer
Carcinoma	Cancer
Enlarge	Get bigger
Hypertension	High blood pressure
Monitor	Keep track of, keep an eye on
Oral	By mouth
Osteoporosis	Soft, brittle bones
Referral	Send you to another doctor
Terminal	Going to die
Toxic	Poisonous

“Medspeak” vs. Plain Speech

- Malignancy
- Diagnosis
- Biopsy
- Medication
- Specimen
- Pneumonia
- Radiology
- Fibrosis



Translate

- We have diagnosed you with a malignancy.
- Your x-ray shows a tumor and we are consulting a pulmonologist.
- Don't allow yourself to become dehydrated.

Chunk and Check

| H HEART

To implement the chunk and check technique, break down the information that you need to discuss and that you need the person to understand into smaller more manageable chunks rather than providing it all at once. The chunks should be related to each other.

In between each 'chunk' use methods such as teach back to 'check' for understanding before moving on.

Chunk and Check Example

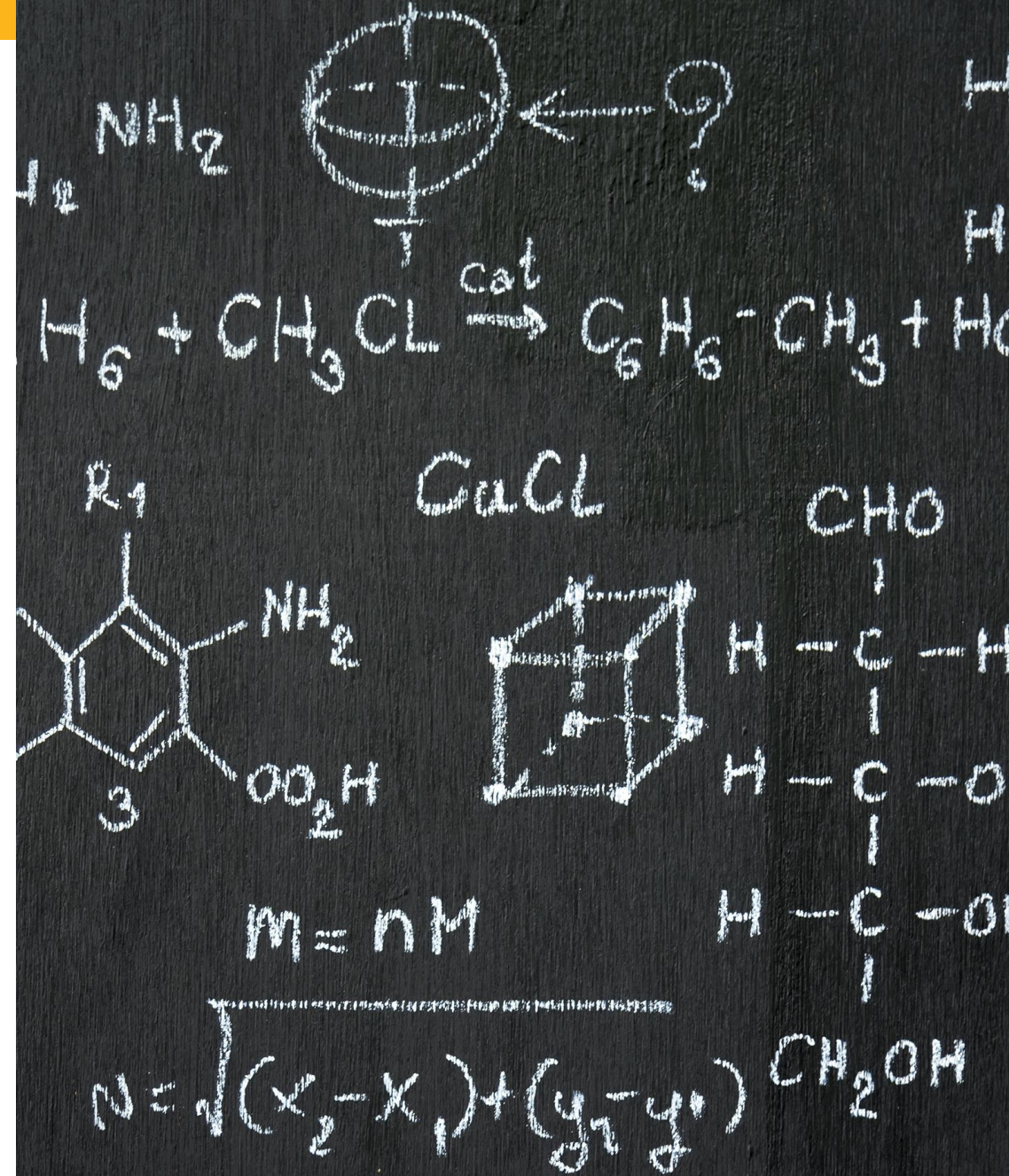
- Well, we got your tests back and I think we found the reason you've been feeling so thirsty, which is that you have diabetes which is caused by not enough insulin in your blood so you will have to be on a diet to avoid sugar and take some medicines to avoid having problems like kidney failure or a heart attack.

Chunk

- You weren't feeling well so we looked into it.
- We found an answer, which is a disease called diabetes.
- This is a serious problem, but there is something we can do about it.
- Let's talk about how to tackle the problem.

Written Communication

- Formatting
- Things to Avoid
- Word Choice
- Content



Written Communication Tips

▪ Formatting

- Clean and obvious path for the eye to follow
 - Use headings and subheadings (chunk)
 - Maintain a consistent style and structure
- Use **bold** to emphasize important points
- Easy to read font in 12 point or larger
 - Times New Roman
 - Arial
 - Calibri
- Left-justify text

▪ Avoid

- ALL CAPITAL LETTERS
- *Italicized* text
- Underlined text
- Acronyms and contractions
- Technical words or jargon
- Passive voice
 - Passive: The results of your lab work will be sent to you.
 - Active: You will receive your lab work results.

Written Communication Tips Continued

- **Word Choice**

- Simple words with 1 or 2 syllables
- Short sentences with 10 to 15 words
- Strong, vivid words, including verbs
- Words or phrases familiar to the audience
- At a 6th grade reading level or below
- Use culturally appropriate words

- **Content**

- Focus on the patient's experience of the condition
- Clearly state
 - What they need to do
 - Why they need to do it
 - When results can be seen
 - Warning signs to watch for
 - What to do if a problem occurs
 - Who to contact with question
- Remove all the fluff

How Assess Health Literacy of a Document

- FRY Graph Calculator
 - [THE FRY GRAPH CALCULATOR - ReadabilityFormulas.com](#)
- Flesch Kincaid Calculator
 - [Flesch Kincaid Calculator | Good Calculators](#)
- TOFLA: Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults
- REALM: Rapid Estimate of Health Literacy in Medicine



Techniques to Address Health Literacy

- Teach-back
 - Explain → check → re-explain if needed
- Show Me
- Ask Me 3

Teach-back



Decreases call-backs, cancelled appointments and improves adherence, health outcomes, and client satisfaction



Prompts:

In your own words, tell me...

Explain to me...

How will you explain....

What will you do if....

When will you...

Step me through tomorrow when you get home...

Show-Me Approach

Confirms a client understands a skill or how to complete a task action by showing how to perform



Secrets to Successful Teach-Back or Show-Me Approaches

Use open-ended questions

Self-correct if you begin to use jargon

Document use of and client's response to technique used

Include family members or caregivers

Pay attention to non-verbal messages

Slow down speech

Talk less, listen more



Ask Me 3

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Ask Me 3: Good Questions for Your Good Health | IHI - Institute for Healthcare Improvement

Dear Parents,

Congratulations on the recent addition to your family.

As parents, you will probably be interested in making all aspects of your baby's life as happy and comfortable as possible. To assist you we have enclosed some information that you might find useful.

If you are interested, we have further information available on post-partum adjustment, immunization, child development, communicable disease, family nutrition, and parenting. Please feel free to contact us on any of these or other topics.

Sincerely,

Your Community Health Nurse

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Carter,

Congratulations on your new baby.

We know that you will want to keep your baby happy and comfortable. We have enclosed some information that may help you.

We also have information on:

- **Post-partum adjustment (getting used to having a baby in your life)**
Child development (how your child grows)
Communicable diseases (diseases your child can catch)
Immunization (protecting your child against those diseases)
Family nutrition (healthy eating)
Parenting

Please call us if we can help you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

Your Community Health Nurse

January 29, 2014

ZZZ Fake
888 Main St.
Springfield, IL 62703

Dear Ms. Fake:

Your ongoing health care is important to us. We have not seen you at the ... clinic in the last 6 months for your **Diabetes and/or High Blood Pressure.**

Please call Rachel or Gina at to make an appointment. Tell them you received this letter when making your appointment.

If you are going to another clinic for your health care or moved and will no longer be coming to our clinic, please call one of the numbers above so we can update our records.

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Best regards,

January 29, 2014

ZZZ Fake
888 Main St.
Springfield, IL 62703

Dear Ms. Fake:

Please call Rachel at 217-747-8960 or Gina at 217-757-8163 at the clinic to make an appointment. We have not seen you in the last 6 months for your **Diabetes and/or High Blood Pressure**.

Tell Rachel or Gina that you received this letter when you call. Your health is important to us. We look forward to hearing from you.

If you are seeing another doctor or have moved please let us know by calling ... so we can update your file.

We look forward to seeing you soon!

Take Home Points



- Health literacy is not a patient problem but a patient-provider problem!!
- Health care practitioners must understand where patients are coming from including their beliefs, values and cultural traditions
- Awareness of the importance of health literacy in improving safety, communication and satisfaction is the first step
- Must develop a system that helps patients navigate the health care process



Questions/Thoughts