Addressing Health Disparities through Health Literacy Awareness

Paula G. Raimondo, MLS, AHIP
Head, Liaison and Outreach Services
May 5, 2013
• Background
• Content of class
• Repercussions/results/outcomes
Non-scientist on UM Institutional Review Board since 2004
Goals

• Raise awareness of relationship between health literacy and health disparities
• Convince HRPO that research investigators and their teams need information about low health literacy could impact their studies
• Expand to all health care providers on campus
In the United States, limited literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, education level, and racial or ethnic group.

The ability to access, understand, and use health-related information and services is critical to the success of my three priorities: improving emergency preparedness, and eliminating health disparities, and preventing disease.

That’s why health literacy is the currency of success for everything I am doing as Surgeon General. And I need your help.

- Richard Carmona, U. S. Surgeon General

Health Literacy of America’s Adults 2006

Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy
Percentage of adults with selected characteristics in below basic health literacy population and in total NAAL population: 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC</th>
<th>% in Below Basic Population</th>
<th>% Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not graduate from high school</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults reporting poor health</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty threshold</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age ≥ 65</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No medical insurance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American adults</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more disabilities</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Baltimore Demographics

- Population 620,000
- 64% African-American
- 28% White
- 7% Hispanic + Asian
- 17% lack health insurance
- Over 4,000 homeless
- 11.8% over 65
- 19.3% below poverty line
- 26% population >25 yrs of age did not complete high school
Health Disparities

• Preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations

• Directly related to the historical and current unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and environmental resources

— US Centers for Disease Control
Class Outline

• Review health literacy facts
• Consider effects of low literacy on health behavior
• Cover best practices for clear health communication
• Introduce literacy evaluation tools
• Practice putting medical gobbledygook into plain language
Evolving Title

• Health Literacy and the Consent Process
• In Other Words: Communicating with Your Patients
• Communicating with Your Patients
• Communicating with Patients
Results

• Offer several times a year as part of workshop schedule
• Invited to give the class to departments on campus
• Library seen as having expertise in health literacy
Results

• Presented to
  – Maryland Learning Collaborative
  – Baltimore high school science teachers
  – Baltimore Department of Health Home Care groups
• Masters thesis advisor for genetic counseling student
• Genetics in plain language grant, tool: *Trust It Or Trash It*
• Health Literacy Maryland
Challenges

• Increase workshop attendance
• Resistance: don’t want to ‘talk down’ to patients
• Explain document during the consent process anyway
Recent Developments

• Consent document review service

• HRPO distribution list = workshop attendance has soared
Extreme disparities: access to care, health literacy blamed for gaps

Health literacy explains racial disparities in diabetes medication adherence

Improving health by improving health literacy

Low health literacy and health outcomes: an updated systematic review

Teaching critical health literacy in the US as a means to action on the social determinants of health
THANK YOU.