

# Addressing Health Disparities through Health Literacy Awareness

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- Background
- Content of class
- Repercussions/  
results/ outcomes

# Nonscientist on UM Institutional Review Board since 2004



**University of Maryland Medical Center**  
Named U.S. Hospital of the Decade for patient safety and quality

# 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.

Health literacy: report of the Council on Scientific Affairs. *JAMA* 281(6): 552-557, 1999.

*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.*

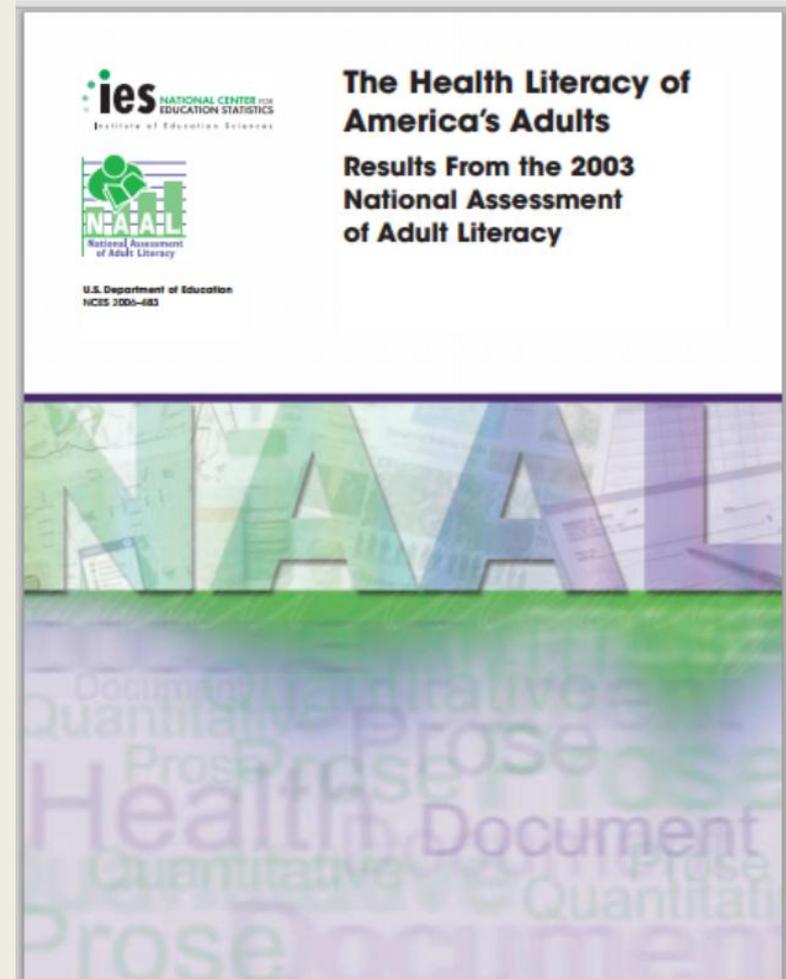
*That's why health literacy is the currency of success for everything I am doing as Surgeon General. And I need your help.*

*- Richard Carmona, U. S. Surgeon General*

Carmona, Richard H. "Health Literacy in America: The Role of Health Care Professionals." American Medical Association House of Delegates, Chicago, 13 June 2003. Available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/news/speeches/ama061403.html>. Accessed April 28, 2013.

# 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

CHARACTERISTIC	% in <i>Below Basic</i> Population	% Total Population
Did not graduate from high school	51	15
Adults reporting poor health	10	4
Below poverty threshold	43	17
Age $\geq$ 65	31	15
No medical insurance	36	18
African-American adults	19	12
One or more disabilities	48	30



# Baltimore Demographics

- Population 620,000
- 64% African-American
- 28% White
- 7% Hispanic + Asian
- 17% lack health insurance 105,400
- Over 4,000 homeless
- 11.8% over 65 73,100
- 19.3% below poverty line 119,600
- 26% population >25 yrs of age did not complete high school 106,400

# 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 gobbledeygook 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

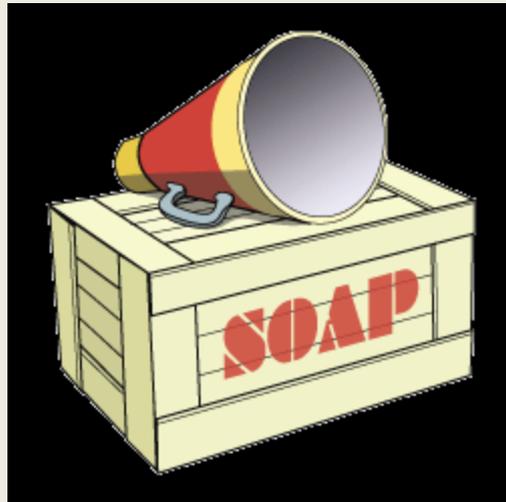
Health literacy explains racial disparities in diabetes medication adherence

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