

Why is health literacy important?

Health care consumers (that's *all* of us!) who have higher levels of health literacy make more informed decisions about their health and maintain better health. They have better levels of illness prevention, self-care, self-advocacy, and communication with health care providers.

- **Better Health** Those with limited health literacy skills (and that includes 88% of us) are more likely to have chronic conditions and are less able to manage them effectively.
- **Fewer Complications** Those with limited health literacy skills have more complications and are more likely to use hospitals and emergency room services rather than services designed to *prevent* complications. This is associated with higher healthcare costs.
- **Less Cost** The gap between the communication methods of health care providers and the abilities of adults to understand health care costs billions each year.

[from Health Literacy Fact Sheet, National Coalition on Literacy, 2009]

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Improving communication strategies
for better health care





Helen Dale

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Our mission is to use our educational and communication expertise to develop strategies for providers that increase patient health literacy and safety.

We specialize in several areas:

- Health literacy awareness
- Training in health communication strategies
- Document readability analysis
- Training in document revision
- Evaluation for continuous improvement
- Literacy and patient safety

HLA Associates:

Helen Dale, Ph.D., specializes in writing, communication, and collaboration strategies. She has provided professional education in English and education for many years.

Carol Gabler, MST, is an adult educator with expertise in managing literacy programs and works to help programs with national accreditation with Proliteracy.

Sue McIntyre, Ph.D, has taught adolescents and adults in both the U.S. and overseas. She currently teaches courses in reading/literacy and adult learning theory .

What is “health literacy”?

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

Did you know?

- \$106-238 billion is lost every year on health care costs because of low health literacy (DH Howard. *The American Journal of Medicine*, 2005.)
- The strongest predictor of health is a person’s literacy level. It is a stronger predictor than age, race, ethnicity, income, employment status, or education level (“Health Literacy: Report of the Council on Scientific Affairs”. *JAMA*, 1999. 281:552-557.)
- Almost half of patients cannot read medications labels effectively (Pfizer White Paper, 2002.)
- Over one-third of the U.S. population cannot:
 - -Use a chart to know when their children need vaccinations
 - -Use a graph to determine a healthy weight range
 - -Read a label well enough so that they do not take anything that could interact with over-the-counter medications (“Low Health Literacy: Implications for National Health Policy.” University of Connecticut, October, 2007.

