

Health Literacy-Oral: First Steps

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Team Effort



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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” (Ratzan and Parker, 2000).

- Includes orally-transmitted health information

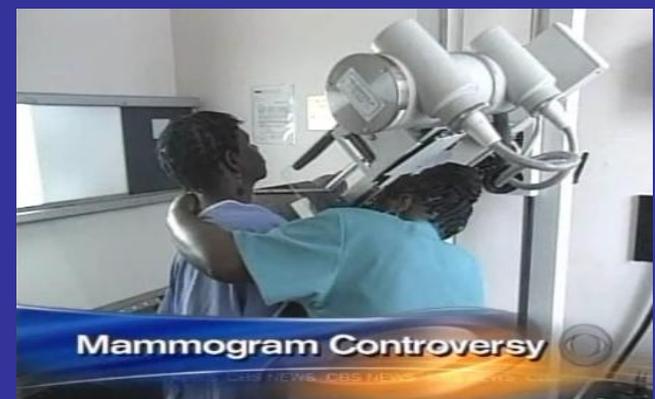
Why study health literacy-oral?

- Research on health literacy-print highlights the fact that many Americans cannot use typical print materials
- Americans get much of their health information from television, radio or personal encounters
- Limited research to date on health literacy-oral
 - little awareness of importance
 - no “best practices”

Important questions

- How well do people understand oral messages?
- What factors affect understanding?
 - Message
 - Sender
 - Receiver
 - Context
- Is health literacy-oral related to health behaviors or health outcomes?

Media Messages about Cancer: What Do People Understand?



Key Findings

- Most participants understood the **gist** of common media messages. *But...*
- **Overgeneralizations** were common
 - *Cancer more prevalent, preventive behaviors more effective, risk factors as causal, screening needed more often...*
- **Misunderstandings** were apparent
- **Details** were lost or misremembered

Example

- Men in sedentary jobs **at greater risk** for prostate cancer
- Being sedentary **causes** prostate cancer
- “There is a **better than 50-50 chance** that you could possibly get prostate cancer.”

Example

- Annual **mammograms save lives**
- **Mammograms prevent breast cancer**
 - “...it’s still helpful to get the mammogram to **reduce getting the cancer.**”
 - “..early detection will **avoid cancer.**”

Example

- Cervical cancer is **caused by a sexually transmitted virus**
- **Cancer** itself **is sexually transmitted**

“If it’s sexually, it’s... transmitted to the female, **cancer can travel**; I didn’t realize that.”

“...it’s a **cancer transmitted** and received and it grows, primarily in the **uterus**.”

Details

- Age, interval wrong for screening
 - Start younger, immediately, annually,
- “Men” should have colonoscopies
- “Limit” = “avoid”
- Risk factors linked to different cancer
 - Obesity linked to stomach, lung
- Stats misremembered
 - “25% of breast cancers” recalled as “25% of deaths from breast cancer”

Implications

- Cannot assume that orally presented information will be understood
- Factors other than reading skill constrain health literacy
- Comprehension difficulties probably not limited to media messages
 - Also likely in clinical practice

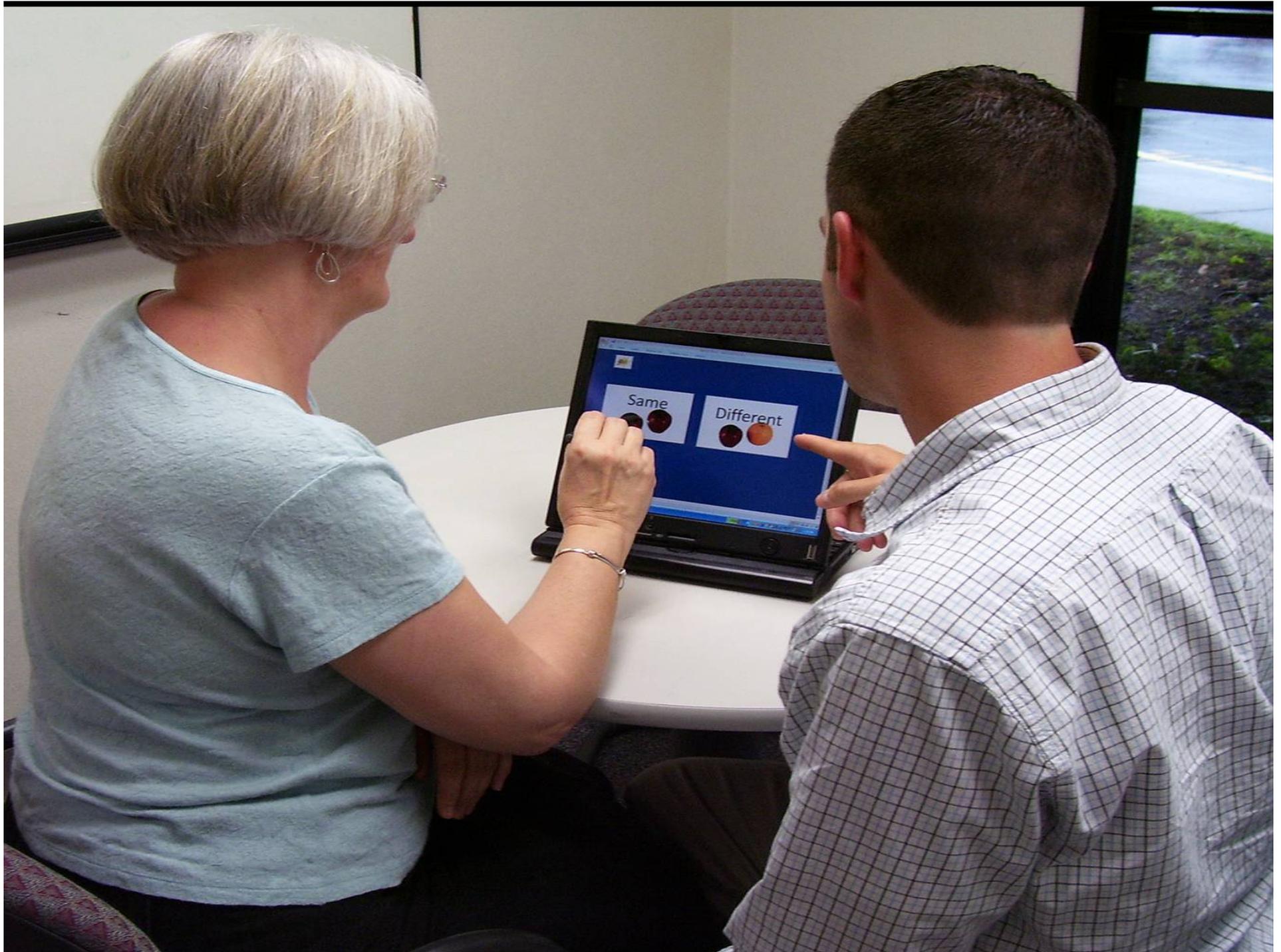
Health Literacy and Cancer
Prevention: Do People
Understand What They Hear?

Aims...

- **To develop and validate a psychometrically sound test of Health Literacy-Oral.**
- To investigate the relationship between health literacy-oral and cancer prevention behaviors.
- To develop and test recommendations for improving oral communication about cancer prevention and screening.

Steps ...

- ✓ Specify test blueprint
- ✓ Collect representative media messages
- ✓ Write representative vignettes and items
- ✓ Produce videos; obtain permissions
- ✓ Program test
- ✓ Pretest
- ✓ Pilot test and revise
- **Administer test to over 1,000 adults**
- Estimate test and item statistics
- Conduct validity studies







**THE FIGHT AGAINST
BREAST CANCER**

abc NEWS

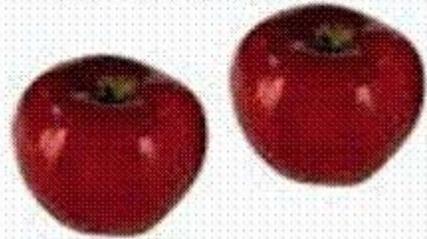
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Sample Item

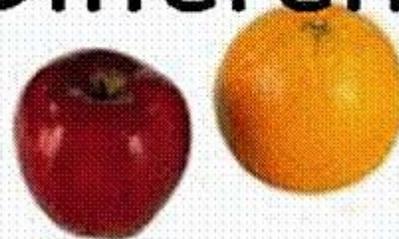
- “.... overall HPV prevalence among females in the United States, ages 14 to 59 years of age, was 26.8%, and that means **one in four women are infected with HPV.**”
- “One in four women in the United States are **infected with cervical cancer.**”



Same



Different



Not Sure?



Next steps

- What factors affect understanding of oral messages?
 - Message
 - Sender
 - Receiver
 - Context
- Is health literacy-oral related to health behaviors or health outcomes?

More research is needed...

- 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**” (Ratzan and Parker, 2000).
 - *How do people obtain information?*
 - *How do people evaluate information?*
 - *Do they act on the information?*
 - *Do they make appropriate decisions?*

Thank you

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