

Improving Health Literacy Friendliness of Health Plans

Health Literacy Annual Research Conference
October 20, 2009

Julie Gazmararian, PhD, MPH
Emory University

National Center for Health Marketing,
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

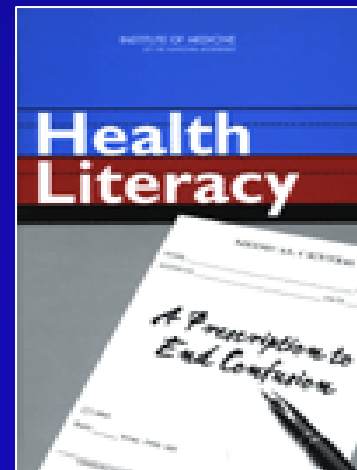


Katherine Beditz, MPH candidate
Emory University



Why Health Plans?

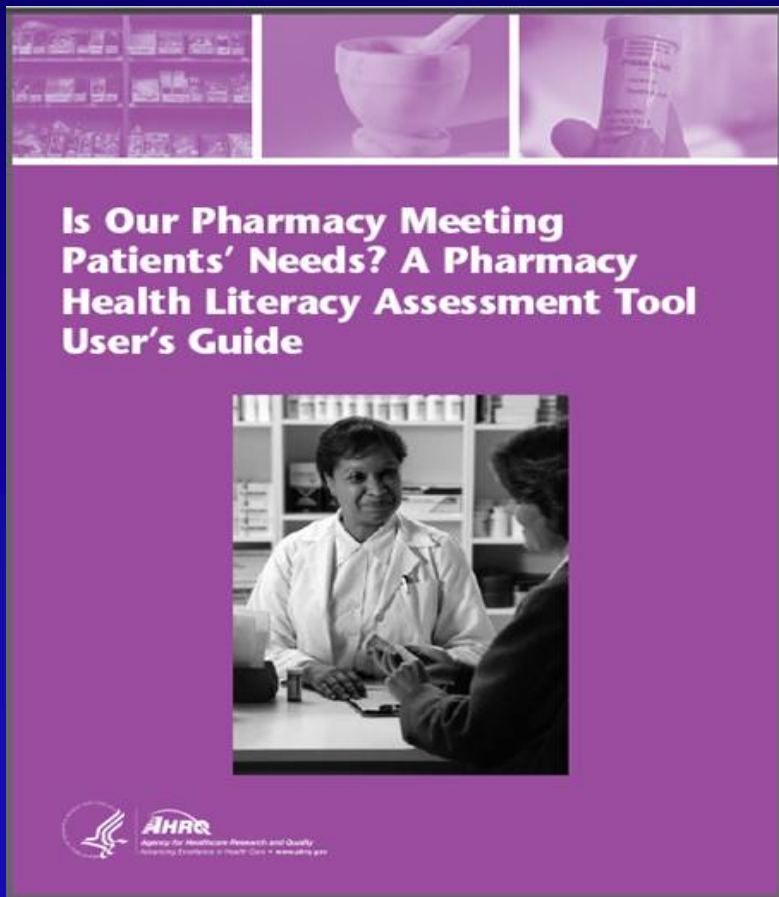
- | **Chronic disease care and self-management**
- | **Patient-provider communication**
- | **Patient safety and health-care quality**
- | **Access to health care and preventive services**
- | **Provider time limitations**
- | **Consumer-directed health care**
- | **Health expenditures**



Project Background

- | **Goal: to modify a pharmacy assessment tool and its applicability to the needs of health insurance plans**
- | **Specific objectives are to:**
 - **Understand how health plans are addressing health literacy;**
 - **Develop tools to assist health plans in furthering health literacy activities; and**
 - **Identify areas for improvement in implementing health literacy activities**

Pharmacy Health Literacy Assessment



Adapted from Literacy Alberta's
Health Literacy Audit

Full guide available at:

<http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/phar>

Health Literacy Assessment Tool for Health Plans

- | Collaboration with AHIP provides opportunity to work with diverse health plans throughout the country
- | Timeline:
 - Adapt tool: Dec 08-April 09
 - Pilot Test: May-June 09
 - Implement: July-Aug 09
 - Disseminate tool: Sept-Nov 09

Inventory of Health Plan Health Literacy Activities

- **January-February 2009**
- **Assess current state of health literacy among health plans**
- **Brief, 10 question, web-based survey**
- **Invited 41 plans to complete survey by e-mail (phone follow-up)**
- **27 of 41 plans completed survey to date (66% response) – 29 individuals**

Examples of Programs/Materials for Members with Low HL Skills

- | Specific reading levels for all materials**
- | Staff training**
- | Simplified consent forms**
- | Simplified health education materials**
- | Plain language toolkit**
- | Revised enrollment form**
- | Interpreter translates materials**

Health Literacy Assessment Areas

- **Member information / navigation**
- **Member services / communication**
- **Web navigation**
- **Forms**
- **Nurse call line**
- **Nurse case/disease management**

Health Literacy Assessment

- | Pilot test – May-June 2009; 8 plans reported, one with two products, 9 total
- | Main – July-Aug 2009; 10 plans reported, one with three products, 12 total
- | Sent out electronic copies of instrument, requested to be mailed back to Emory
- | Data entered in excel spreadsheet
- | Plans represented Medicare, Medicaid, PPO, POS, HMO, combination

Key Findings

Member Information:

- | Most plans have reading level guidelines, typically grade 6 or below
- | Clear language guidelines are often available, but frequently not used

Member Services:

- | About two-thirds of plans provide training to employees on recognition of indications that a member does not understand what is being said

Key Findings

Web Navigation:

- | More than 1/3 plans indicated guidelines exist to ensure ease of website navigation; however, often not used
- | Websites often include information in other languages

Forms:

- | Most plans have clear language guidelines to ensure forms are simple/clear without medical jargon
- | Very few plans had guidelines for the amount of white space provided in forms

Key Findings

Nurse Call Line:

- | Few plans have guidelines for identifying medical and scientific jargon that should be avoided when discussing health information with members
- | Most organizations have provided training to nurse call line employees on recognition of indicators that the member does not understand

Case and Disease Management:

- | Most plans have guidelines for using graphics and illustrations in case/disease management materials that enhances readability

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Infuse clear health communication into all prevention and chronic care disease management programs
- Integrate disciplines and approaches within organizations
- Collaborate with other health care partners and communities
- Document success

Extra Slides

America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) Health Literacy Activities

- | Created Health Literacy Task Force**
- | Present case studies and other information sharing during monthly Task Force conference calls**
- | Webinar on reader and user friendly web design for health plans, April 2008**
- | Sponsored an all day training session in June 2008**
- | Transformed training session into a series of three webinars**

Checklist and Guidelines

- | Checklist of steps to apply principles of clear health communication to web-based materials, including Personal Health Records
- | Guidelines for developing and designing user-friendly health plan Web sites

