

## HEALTH LITERACY TEACH-IN

### OVERVIEW

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, Title V, (aka Obama Care) ‘defines health literacy as the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions.’

Activity for both the Healthcare.Gov Exchanges (Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum Plans) starting in the Fall of 2013 and Healthy Michigan (Expanded Medicaid in April 2014) has been directed largely toward the “enrollment process.” – to a large extent this has been successful because of the roles played by the likes of ‘Navigators, Assistors and Health Ministry advocates.

What we have come to learn along the way however, is that new enrollees, many of whom have never been insured before, do not understand even basic administrative terms, such as what they are eligible for, nor do they comprehend what is “a premium, a deductible, co-pays and the like” – literally, for many **“we have given folks a driver’s license without reading a manual or behind the wheel training.”** Being enrolled (insured) is a valued first step but we have many miles to travel. This then is the beginning of that journey, a GPS if you would, and objective of today’s conference titled **“Steering Health Care: Destination Well-Being”**

#### **Low health literacy is generally more prevalent among:**

- Older adults
- Minority populations
- Families/individuals with low socioeconomic status
- Those who are medically underserved

#### **Patients with low health literacy may have difficulty:**

- Locating providers and services
- Filling out complex health forms
- Sharing (even knowing) their family medical history with providers
- Seeking and adopting preventive health care measures
- Understanding the connection between risky behaviors & one’s health
- Managing chronic health conditions
- Understanding directions on medicine

The *Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)* is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services located in Rockville, Maryland. Health Literacy is especially important to HRSA and the people it serves.

A large segment of the people HRSA serves are poor and medically underserved, who need help understanding and navigating a complex health care system. They require culturally competent providers who speak their language in order to make informed health care choices.

A number of patients may be confused with certain medical language, have difficulty understanding English, struggle with filling out forms, or have limited access to health providers in their community. With the proper training, health care professionals can identify patients' specific health literacy levels and make simple communication adjustments.

Anyone who **needs** health information and services also needs health literacy skills to

- Find information and services
- Communicate their needs and preferences and respond to information and services
- Process the meaning and usefulness of the information and services
- Understand the choices, consequences and context of the information and services
- Decide which information and services match their needs and preferences so they can act

Anyone who **provides** health information and services to others, such as a doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, a parish or faith community nurse or public health worker, also needs health literacy skills to:

- Use simple language, short sentences and define technical terms
- Supplement instruction with appropriate materials (videos, models, pictures, etc.)
- Ask patients to explain your instructions (**teach back method**) or demonstrate the procedure
- Ask questions that begin with “how” and “what,” rather than closed-ended yes/no questions
- Organize information so that the most important points stand out and repeat this information
  
- Help people find information and services
- Communicate about health and healthcare
- Process what people are explicitly and implicitly asking for
- Understand how to provide useful information and services
- Decide which information and services work best for different situations and people so they can act

Today's Teach-In will address many of these in some form - we trust you will find today's presentations to be useful in working with & advocating for the people you serve.

Resource Tables in the Lobby and the internet links provided to the various organizations shown in their presentations today should assist greatly as well.

Visit Coalition's web site at [www.interfaithhealthhope.org](http://www.interfaithhealthhope.org).

Thank you