


Assess Your Practice

Overview

Effectively serving your patients involves considering health literacy in all areas of your practice. Patients of all literacy levels must interact with schedulers, nurses, and doctors, as well as understand how to manage their health. We have developed the [Health Literacy Assessment Questions](#)  to help you assess how your practice is performing in several key areas that affect patient understanding and satisfaction. Completing this assessment process may help to identify opportunities to improve the experience and outcomes of your patients.

For each assessment question, we have assigned a level of importance based on the perceived benefit to improve patient understanding. The assigned levels are as follows:

- * Beneficial
- ** More Beneficial
- *** Most Beneficial

Purpose

To provide your practice with a method of assessing how you are meeting the needs of your patients. This tool may help you to identify strengths, barriers, and opportunities for improvement.

Testimonials


All of the practices that tested the toolkit found the health literacy assessment beneficial. Here are some comments:

- “The assessment increased our attention to areas not previously identified as concerns, like the signs in our practice. We just don’t think of those things every day.”
- “Before doing the assessment, we had an idea about what tool we wanted to try. But after discussing our assessment questions, we completely changed our selection.”
- “We liked the assessment process, and when we looked at our answers, our priorities just lit up.”

Action

1. Answer the Health Literacy Assessment Questions.

The assessment has 49 questions and can be completed in less than 30 minutes. We suggest you have several people complete the assessment questions on their own, and then come together for a group discussion to review the results.


- **Identify several people to complete the assessment questions.**
Choose clinical and administration staff members. Aim to include at least one person from each area of your practice.
- **Print a copy of the [Health Literacy Assessment Questions](#)  for each person.**
- **Have each person answer the Health Literacy Assessment Questions** for your practice. One or more people may consider doing a “practice walk-through” when a practice member acts like a patient and experiences the practice from the patient’s perspective while answering the questions.


2. Discuss the assessment questions and choose a tool.

After everyone has completed the assessment questions, use the results to set your aims and choose tools to implement.

- **Review and discuss the assessment results.**
Organize a meeting with those staff who completed the assessment questions, as well as the members of your health literacy team. You may consider focusing on the areas that you notice questions answered “Needs Improvement” or “Not Doing,” as these represent potential opportunities for improvement.
- **Set one or more aims.**
Now that you have an idea what areas you want to improve, it is helpful to set one or more aims for your practice. An aim is a specific statement summarizing what your organization hopes to achieve. Your aim should be specific and time measurable. An aim is important to help everyone in the practice understand the goal and to facilitate communication about the ideas for change. For example:
 - ◇ “The practice will improve telephone communication with patients over the next quarter.”
 - ◇ “Over the next 6 months, the practice will put systems in place to promote patient medication adherence.”

- **Choose a tool.**

Review your assessment questions in the area addressed by your aim. If you see several areas that are important to you, consider starting with questions rated *** or ** in the importance level. These practice areas are most important for improving patient outcomes, but you may choose to modify the level of importance based on the workings of your practice. For each question selected, review the items in the Tools to Help column to identify the specific tools to use. We suggest that you focus your efforts by implementing one, or possibly two, tools at a time. Refer to [Tools](#)  for a comprehensive list of tools.
- **Plan and start your implementation.**

Read the tool and develop a plan for making changes. First, test some small changes. Try something with one clinician and/or a few patients to see how the new ideas change the flow in the practice. Remember that even the best laid plans may not lead to the results you want. Work out the kinks on a small scale before spreading it to the rest of the practice. For more information about the improvement strategies go to the [Overview](#)  section.
- **Establish Health Literacy Universal Precautions in your practice.**

Health Literacy Universal Precautions require that your practice have systems in place to address each of the four key change areas. Stay focused on your aims, but continue to add new aims and implement tools until your practice has addressed all four of the key change areas:

 1. Improve Spoken Communication.
 2. Improve Written Communication.
 3. Improve Self-Management and Empowerment.
 4. Improve Supportive Systems.

Track Your Progress

After implementing one or more tools, you should consider the following:

- Confirm that any tools implemented are now a regular part of care throughout the practice.
- Verify that all four key change areas have been addressed in your practice.
- Develop a plan to re-assess your practice at regular intervals.
- Continue to monitor progress and update your health literacy priorities as needed.

Resources

Sources for developing this assessment tool include:

- Rudd RE, Anderson JE. *The Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals and Health Centers. Partners for Action: Making Your Healthcare Facility Literacy-Friendly.* Cambridge MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. 2007.
- Jacobsen KL, Gazmararian JA, Kripalani S, McMorris KJ, Blake SC, Brach C. *Is Our Pharmacy Meeting Patients' Needs? A Pharmacy Health Literacy Assessment Tool User's Guide.* 2007. (Prepared under contract No. 290-00-0011T07.) AHRQ Pub No. 07-0051. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. October 2007.