

About Health Literacy

October is Health Literacy Month,¹ an annual event that began 12 years ago. Helen Osborne of Health Literacy Consulting, is the founding director of this campaign designed to raise awareness of the need for health information every patient can understand. The event has been instrumental in spreading the word about health literacy among colleagues, patients, and professionals in the health care industry.

What is Health Literacy?

The American Medical Association defines health literacy as “the ability to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment.”²

In plain language, that means:

- Health information needs to be easy to find, read, and understand.
- We all need easy access to information and services so we are able to do what we need to do to get and stay healthy.

What is the relationship between health literacy and plain language?

Health literacy is about access, understanding, and tools for making decisions. Plain language is the means to do that. Briefly, it is:

- Clear communication
- Organized content
- Simple language—all at a level the intended reader can understand

What does health literacy mean for you and your own health care?

It means you can find and use the services and information you need to get and stay healthy, regardless of how well educated you are or how well you read. Health literacy isn't about just one group of patients. It is relevant to every single person from every walk of life.

What does health literacy mean for your organization?

It means you and your co-workers or employees have easy access to the health information and services they need. It means:

- Healthy employees with healthy families
- Reduced time loss
- Fewer work related injuries
- Reduced workplace costs
- A healthier workplace

Resources

¹ http://www.healthliteracy.com/hl_month.asp

² <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8115.html>