Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy

(Formerly known as the Georgia Conference on Information Literacy)

Sep 25th, 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

Health Literacy 101: Increasing Literacy Reduces Health Disparities

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What is Health Literacy?

The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health care decisions.

- Healthy People 2010

• Basic 29%
• Proficient 13%
• Intermediate 44%
• Below Basic 14%

From the National Assessment of Adult Literacy in 2001

“Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations.”

- CDC, 2013

Why does Health Literacy Matter?

It’s needed to effectively:

- Fill out a patient information form
- Follow discharge instructions
- Manage medications
- Care for a loved one’s health
- Keep appointments
- Select and understand insurance
- Identify signs and warning labels
- Research health information
- Sign consent forms

Underutilization of services
Increased medication errors
Poor understanding of health
Increased ER visits and hospitalizations
Poor health outcomes
Increased healthcare costs for all

Low Health Literacy leads to:

Communication tools:

- Plain language
- Easy-to-understand materials
- Questions & self advocacy
- Teach-back technique
- Visual and audio resources
- Cultural competence

Communication tools:

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