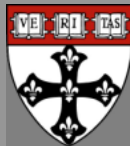


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# Health Literacy & Oral Health

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Harvard School of Public Health



4323.0, "A Tribute to Dr. Alice M. Horowitz"

# A Study in Contrasts

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Storybook Alice

Dr. Alice M. Horowitz



# Alice's Adventures in Wonderland



Alice forgot all she knew ...her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do. . .

# Lost and Confused



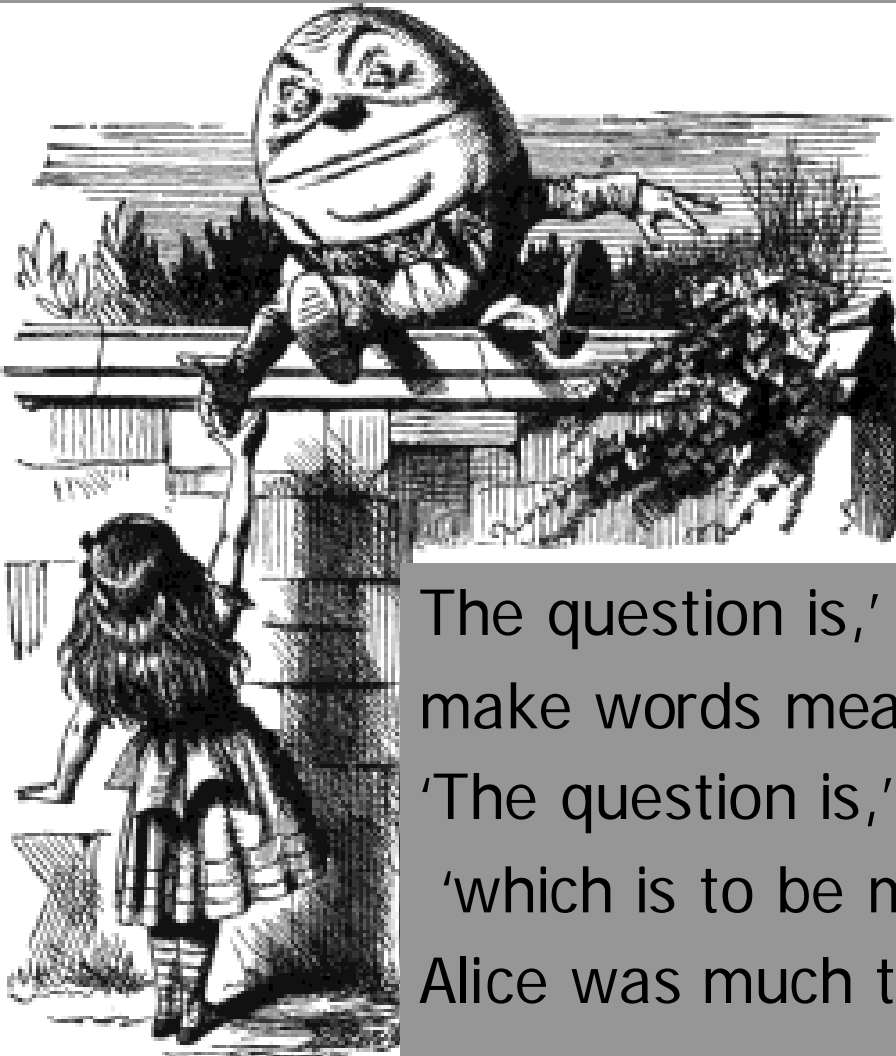
You should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.

`I do,' Alice hastily replied; `at least--at least I mean what I say--that's the same thing, you know.'

`Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter....

'Really, now you ask me,' said Alice, very much confused, `I don't think--'

`Then you shouldn't talk,' said the Hatter.



'When I use a word,'  
Humpty Dumpty said,  
in a rather scornful tone,  

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'it means just what I choose  
it to mean – neither more  
nor less.'

The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can  
make words mean so many different things.'  
'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty,  
'which is to be master – that's all.'  
Alice was much too puzzled to say anything...

# Meandering



- ` Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'
- ` That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.
- ` I don't much care where--' said Alice.
- ` Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.
- ` --so long as I get *SOMEWHERE*,' Alice added as an explanation.
- ` Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, ` if you only walk long enough.'



# AMH at NIH/HHS

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- Attentive to literacy skills of US adults
- Enhanced awareness of literacy related barriers to care and treatment
- Moved beyond the medical encounter
- Disseminated findings
- Developed a research agenda
- Supported research studies
- Analyzed system barriers
- Considered policy implications

# AMH: Addressing the Oral Health Context

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## Promote Dialogue

- Encourage questions
- Ask for examples

## Remove Barriers

- Eliminate jargon
- Use everyday words
- Avoid faulty assumptions

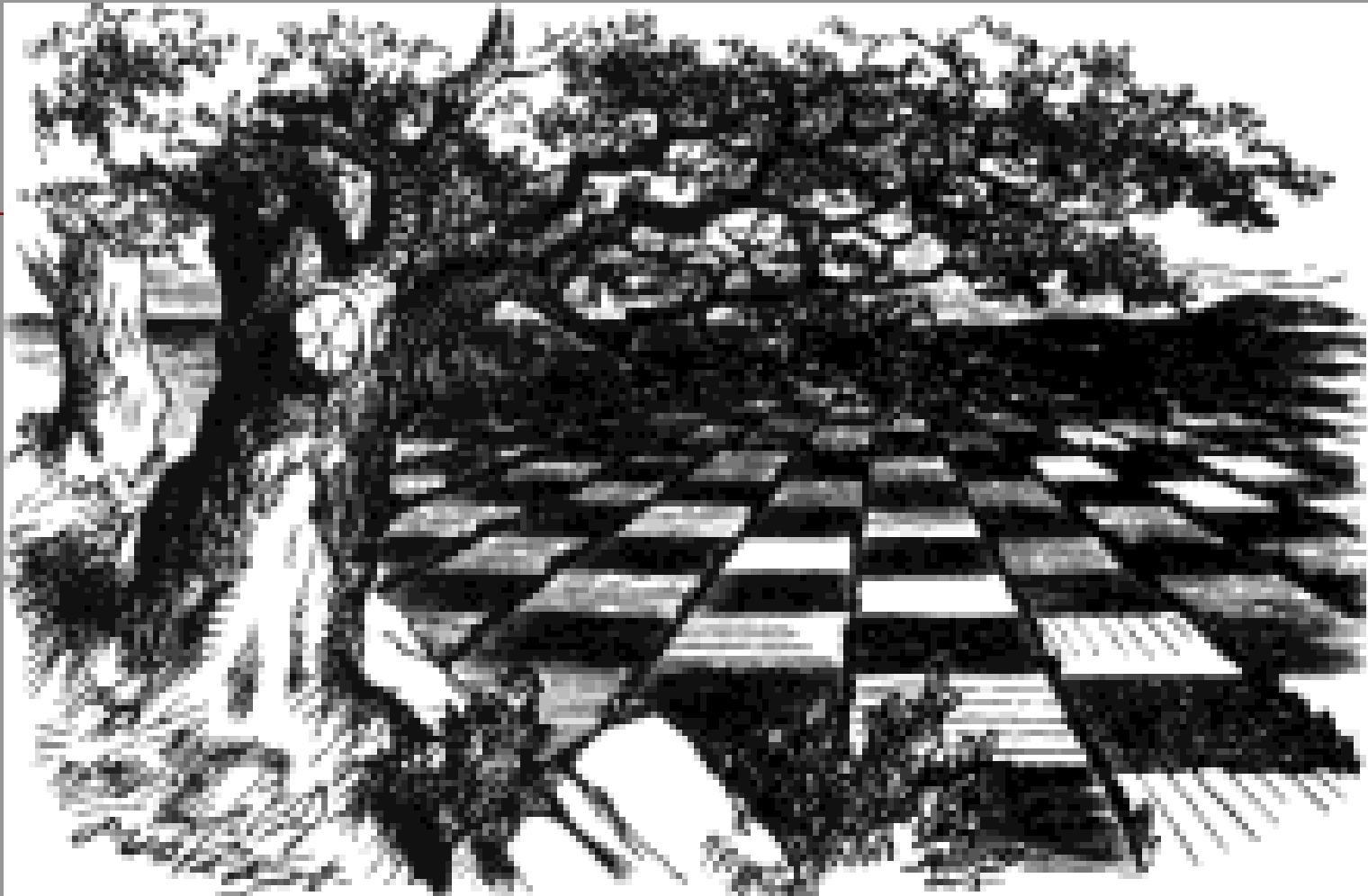




# Is There a More Appropriate Model Character?

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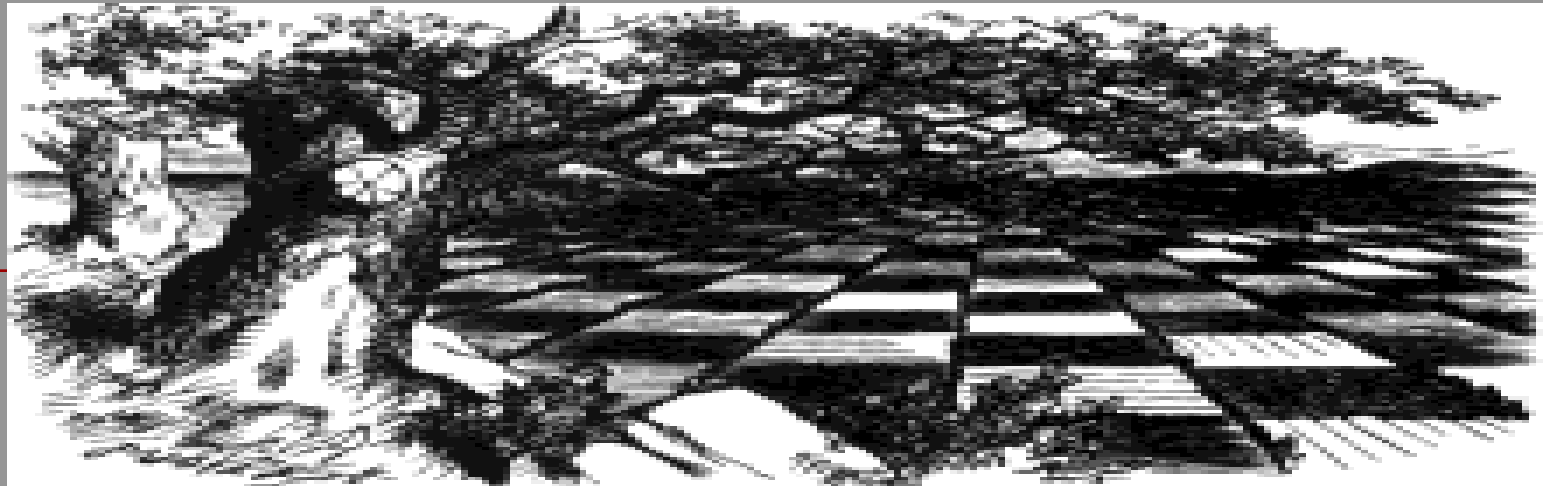




... they were running hand in hand, and the Queen went so fast that it was all she could do to keep up with her: and still the Queen kept crying `Faster! Faster!' but Alice felt she *could not* go faster, though she had not breath left to say so.



- ` Are we nearly there?' Alice managed to pant out at last.
- ` Nearly there!' the Queen repeated. ` Why, we passed it ten minutes ago! Faster! And they ran on for a time in silence, with the wind whistling in Alice's ears, and almost blowing her hair off her head, she fancied.
- ` Now! Now!' cried the Queen. ` Faster! Faster!'



... just as Alice was getting quite exhausted, they stopped, and she found herself sitting on the ground, breathless and giddy.

The Queen propped her up against a tree, and said kindly, `You may rest a little now.'

Alice looked round her in great surprise. `Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything's just as it was!'



- `Of course it is,' said the Queen, `what would you have it?'
- `Well, in *our* country,' said Alice, still panting a little, `you'd generally get to somewhere else -- if you ran very fast for a long time, as we've been doing.'





"Slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

# Where have we been? Where should we go?

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The Invisible Barrier: Literacy and its Relationship with Oral Health. *Journal of Public Health Dentistry*. 65 (3): 174-182. 2005.

# Attend to Literacy Skills

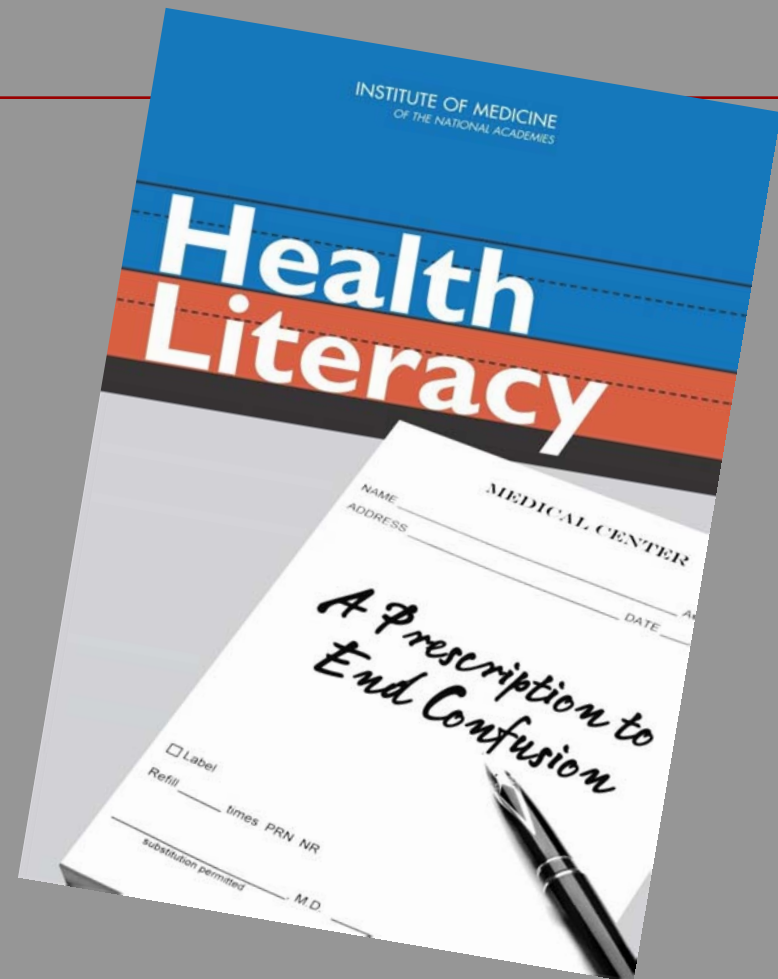
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- Literacy influences one's ability to access information and to navigate the highly literate environments of modern society
- Significant numbers of adults are limited in their ability to use everyday materials to accomplish mundane tasks [NALS, NAAL]
- Those with more general literacy skills will also be more likely to have stronger health literacy skills

# Consider Literacy within Health Contexts

## *Health Literacy:*

An interaction between skills of individuals and social demands



# Take Responsibility

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World wide, we see an increased demand from complex health care systems & increased responsibility for individuals interacting with health care systems

Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Surveys, 2003

Failure to provide patients with information about their care in ways that they can understand, will continue to undermine other efforts to improve patient safety

Joint Commission Public Policy White Paper, 2007

# Shift Emphasis

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From: Portraits of adults with limited literacy skills

To: Examinations of the interplay of social factors

Link to health disparities

Respect for Autonomy

Attention to Social Justice



# Shift Locus of Responsibility

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Patients' ability to understand health and medical issues and directions is related to the clarity of the communication.

*Communicating Health: Priorities and Strategies for Progress* Health and Human Services 2003

# Analyze

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- Expectations
- Language and culture of oral health contexts [public health, private practice, research, policy]
- Institutional & bureaucratic processes
- Commercial sector
  - Products & approaches
  - Media portrayals

# Set a Research Agenda

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Examine:

- Assumptions
- Communication exchange
- Protocols and Policies
- Professional training

# Engage

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## Change

- Programs
- Materials & Forms
- Tools
- Communication strategies

# Hats Off to Dr. Alice M. Horowitz

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