Utilizing Health Literacy in Chronic Disease Prevention
Brian Wyant, Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction

Background
Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic information and services needed to make appropriate decisions for their health. An individual’s level of health literacy is influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural and language factors, education, experience with the health care system, the complexity of information and how it is communicated, and aging. Patients with low health literacy are at risk for medical misunderstanding, mistakes, excessive hospitalizations, and poor health outcomes. Health literacy is a stronger predictor of an individual’s health status than age, income, employment status, education level or racial/ethnic group.

Health Literacy Framework: Potential Intervention Points
To improve health literacy and encourage healthcare communication among cardiovascular patients aged 50 and older, Pennsylvania has partnered with the Health Care Improvement Foundation (HCIF) to provide health literacy training to providers and patient activation training to senior groups in Southeastern Pennsylvania through the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Enhancements Addressing Disconnects in Cardiovascular Health Communication project (SEPA-READS).

Objectives
- Explain the need for health literacy training and education in supporting chronic disease prevention and management.
- Identify successful health literacy interventions that can be implemented by health systems and community organizations.

Methods
To address health literacy needs on both sides of health care encounters (patient and provider), SEPA-READS takes a multi-pronged approach which includes:
- Health care provider health literacy train-the-trainer sessions on topics such as oral communication, written materials development, web design, informed consent, and wayfinding.
- Support for organizational changes including mini-grants to hospitals to pilot programs, modify materials, or address e-health needs as they relate to health literacy.
- Consumer education and activation through training of seniors as peer educators on the Ask Me 3 communication technique in Senior Centers, ESL classes, and other community venues.
- Additional programming including the formation of a Cardiovascular Health Literacy Coalition, webinars, networking calls, an online portal, and newsletter.

Provider Training and Education
Provider trainings cover many proven techniques for improving oral and written communication. Teach-back is one such strategy. When using teach-back, the provider confirms patient understanding by having the patient restate what they’ve been told.

Hospital Organizational Changes
With the knowledge gained through provider training, technical support from an expert health literacy consultant, and financial support through annual mini-grants, hospitals have made changes such as:
- Adopting teach-back as primary education tool for CHF patients
- Including teach-back training in staff orientation sessions
- Expanding internal training across disciplines and formats
- Reviewing and revising patient education materials

Conclusions and Next Steps
Both provider and community trainings have been well-attended and consistently receive positive evaluations. Providers have shared a number of success stories resulting from the implementation of techniques they learned at the training, and outcomes evaluation is currently underway. With many successful health literacy implementations improved over the last few years, hospitals are beginning to identify and undertake challenging initiatives that require administrative support, such as updating maps and signage and evaluating the effectiveness of teach-back. Peer educators continue to hold sessions and teach Ask Me 3 to other community members. Evaluation to determine whether community members are utilizing Ask Me 3 in their healthcare encounters will commence shortly.

Consumer Activation
Activation focused on Ask Me 3, a patient education program developed by the National Patient Safety Foundation (NPSF) designed to promote communication between health care consumers and their providers.

Ask Me 3 encourages health care consumers to ask the following questions in encounters with health care providers:
1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

To date, over 90 peer educators from 10 community organizations (5 senior-serving organizations, 5 organizations serving refugee/immigrant groups) have been trained, and nearly 500 community members have participated in peer educator-led sessions. Peer educators are highly praised in positive evaluations that indicate knowledge of and intention to use Ask Me 3 techniques in their next healthcare encounter.

This poster was supported by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant Funds. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.