

Clear Communication: A Key to Better Patient Care

Health literacy affects a patient's ability to understand health information and make informed decisions about their care. In the United States, only 12% of adults have proficient health literacy, and one in three adults has basic or below basic skills, meaning many patients struggle with everyday tasks like taking medications correctly or following care instructions.

Patients often forget most of what they hear during a visit or remember it incorrectly. And many do not ask questions when they are confused. Limited health literacy is linked to poorer health outcomes, including higher hospitalization rates and lower use of preventive services. **Using clear, simple communication strategies** helps ensure patients understand their care, follow treatment plans and feel more confident managing their health.



Clearly Communicate with Your Patient

Use plain language when communicating with your patient.

Keep It Simple

- Avoid jargon.
- Do not use acronyms.
- Avoid technical language. Define it if you must use it.
- Give information in small chunks. Focus on key behaviors or actions that the patient must take.

Reinforce

- Speak slowly and at a normal volume.
- Use body language to support what you are saying.
- Draw pictures, or use posters, models, or physical demonstrations.
- When using written materials, circle or highlight key information.
- Read written instructions aloud.

Get Help

- Use video and audio media as an alternative to written information.
- Use medically trained interpreters.
- Use written translation services.
- Assess patient capabilities and consent to allow family members or caregivers to play an active role.

"Communication: Communicate with Courtesy, Respect and Listening." Patient Experience Learning Series, Press Ganey, 2024, www.cahpsprovider.com/.