



September 8, 2020

David W. Baker, MD, MPH, FACP
Executive Vice President, Healthcare Quality Evaluation
The Joint Commission
One Renaissance Blvd.
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

Dear Dr. Baker,

In an effort to make hospitals more accountable for health literacy best practices, Karen Komondor, RN, established the National Council to Improve Patient Safety through Health Literacy and brought together healthcare professionals with expertise in health literacy from across the country to develop a plan of action. The National Council's work culminated in the development of the enclosed proposal to the Joint Commission, recommending health literacy become a national safety goal.

In a recent study, researchers found that patients with low health literacy had more than four times the odds of postoperative infection. And, The Patient Safety Network reports infections are the most common preventable postoperative complications. Dr. Baker, I know you're aware of the well-established relationship between health literacy and health outcomes. You proposed a conceptual framework in 2006 to explain the potential causal pathways. More than a decade later, we continue to witness how limited health literacy increases a person's risk for an adverse medical event.

The increased risk for poor outcomes is borne by the most vulnerable in society, as low health literacy is disproportionately found among members of minority groups and persons of low-income. In this scenario, without greater accountability for addressing health literacy, health inequities and disparities may widen, especially in clinical settings. The healthcare system has increased in complexity, increasing the burden on all people to understand and use health information.

The Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) is a nonprofit, 501 (c)(3) healthcare public benefit charity, with the mission of empowering people to better health.

To fulfill our mission, we:

- Publish easy-to-read, easy-to-use "What To Do For Health" self-help health book series in multiple languages
- Host a national annual continuing education health literacy conference

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- Publish the peer-reviewed, open access health literacy journal, *Health Literacy Research and Practice*
- Provide health literacy communication consulting services including rewrite and redesign
- Sponsor the Health Literacy Solutions Center with over 5,000 active participants on the discussion list

IHA has collaborated with Cynthia Baur, PhD, Horowitz Center for Literacy and Michael Paasche-Orlow, MD, Health Literacy Annual Research Conference (HARC) on the implementation of an innovative conference format consisting of cross-disciplinary sessions highlighting current research, practice, and policy.

I strongly support this proposal for the Joint Commission to elevate health literacy to a national safety goal. This is well aligned with our mission and the commitment of the Joint Commission to ensure safe, high-quality care for all. Without a mandate in place, many organizations do not consistently implement health literacy best practices.

The resource investment and healthcare professionals to lead the improvements are lacking in many cases. Budget and resource allocations are impacted heavily by regulations and licensing requirements. If the Joint Commission makes health literacy explicit as a national safety goal, it may be a big step to reducing the gap in hospital outcomes between racial and ethnic groups.

If you have further inquiries please feel free to call or e-mail me at the contact information listed below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Villaire". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being more prominent than the last name "Villaire".

Michael Villaire, MSLM
President / CEO
Institute for Healthcare Advancement
(714) 318-7237 (mobile / remote)
mvillaire@iha4health.org