

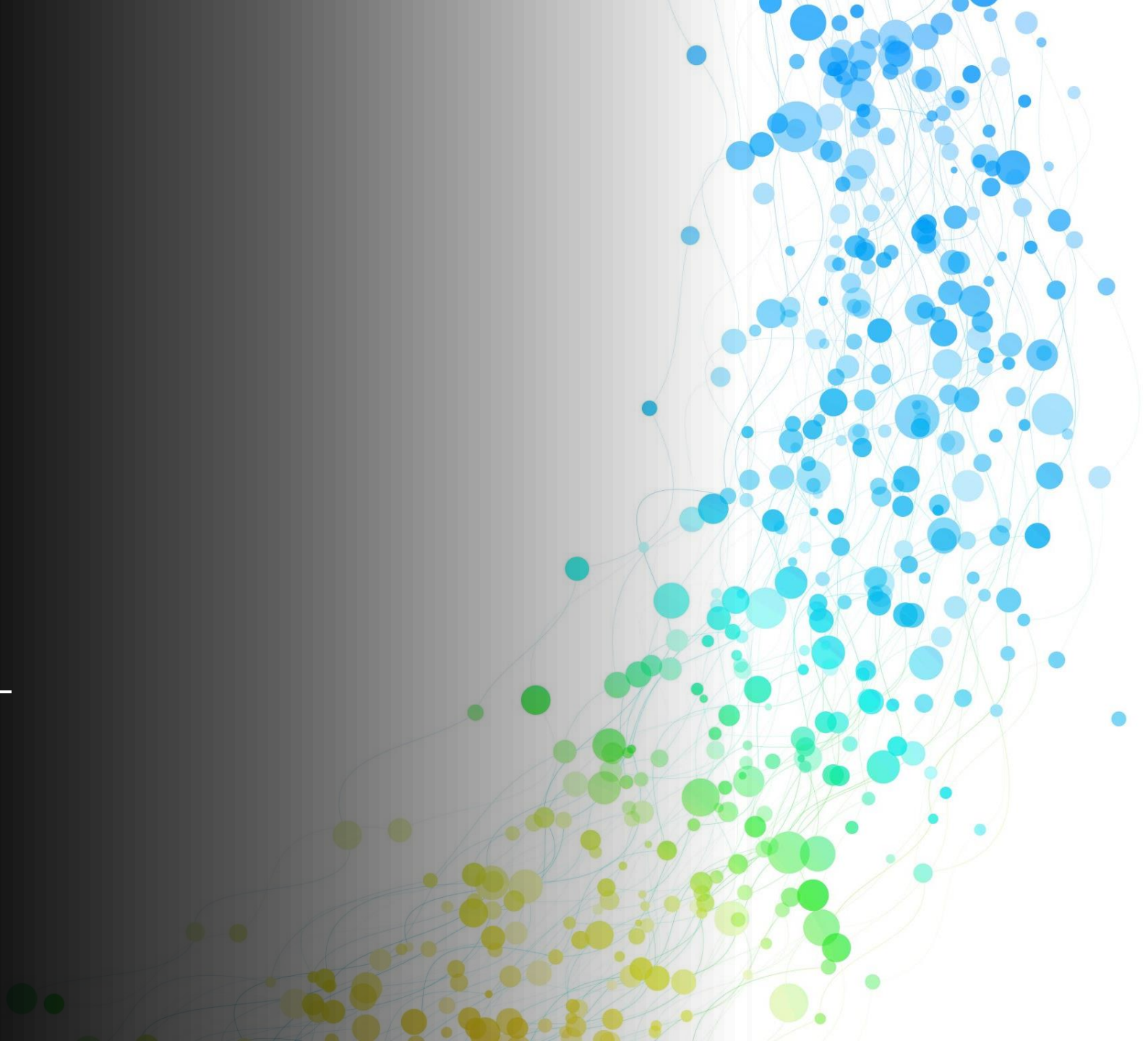


Improving Health Literacy in People Living With Communication Deficits

Valerie J Connor, MA CCC-SLP, MS CHES

Speech Language Pathologist: Quad Cities Rehab Institute

Professor: St. Joseph's College of Maine



Session Goals

Objectives:

1. Define common health literacy challenges affecting individuals with communication deficits.
2. Identify common communication barriers individuals experience when consuming health education materials
3. Develop an action plan to improve health outcomes in patients with communication deficits.

Summary:

Improving patient safety is at the forefront of nearly every healthcare initiative. Research shows that understanding health related materials is a key component to improving not only patient safety, but patient satisfaction scores. One common barrier to health literacy is communication deficits. Understanding those deficits and identifying ways to compensate for communication barriers is an important step towards empowering patients and improving patient autonomy. In this session, participants will identify common communication barriers as they relate to health literacy. Five simple steps will be introduced that can immediately be implemented by any healthcare professional.



Introduction

Valerie J Connor, MA CCC-SLP, MS CHES, DHSc ABD

Employment:

Quad Cities Rehab Institute

- Speech Language Pathologist

St. Joseph's College of Maine

- Adjunct Professor

Health Literacy In Acute Care Settings

- The U.S. healthcare system generally assumes that all patients have appropriate language literacy skills. This is not the case.
- Fifty percent of U.S. citizens have difficulty comprehending health information
- Limited health literacy is a patient safety risk
- It is estimated that 50-70 billion dollars are wasted each year due to poor health literacy, for example:
 - Lengthier hospital stays
 - More frequent acute care admissions
 - Unused or improperly used prescriptions
 - Lack of proper interdisciplinary care



Health Literacy Defined

- “The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic information and services needed to make appropriate decisions regarding their health” (HRSA, 2022)
- Includes:
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Listening
 - Speaking
 - Conceptual knowledge



Common Health Literacy Challenges

- Education
- Language barriers
- Learning disabilities
- Visual deficits
- Neurological disorders
- Cultural differences
- Economic status

*patients with low health literacy have an increased chance of acute care admission (15% vs 32%)

**lower levels of education associated with poorer health outcomes

The image shows two axial MRI brain scans. The top scan is a T2-weighted image showing hyperintense areas in the white matter. The bottom scan is a T1-weighted image showing normal brain anatomy. Both scans have technical data overlays in white text, including parameters like TR, TE, SL, and TA. A red curved line is visible on the right side of the image.

Communication Deficits

- Aphasia
- Apraxia
- Neurological deficits
- Memory loss
- Dementia/Alzheimer's
- Visual perceptual deficits



Barriers to Consuming Health Literature

- Aphasia
- Apraxia
- Neurological deficits
- Memory loss
- Dementia/Alzheimer's
- Visual perceptual deficits

Steps to Overcome Barriers and Improve Health Literacy

1. Assess health literacy
2. Avoid jargon and slow down
Commit to Sit
3. Test informed consent/educational materials
Literacy-level assessment – Microsoft Word: Flesch-Kinkaid
Readability Test
Teach Back Method
4. Use alternative methods as needed
5. Reduce shame



Next Steps

- Educate staff
- Continue to assess and evaluate effectiveness of measures taken
- Make small changes
- Provide reassurance



A red flag pin is stuck into a map of a city street grid. The flag is red with a silver pin. The map shows a grid of streets with some green areas representing parks or fields. The flag is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the map.

References

- HRSA (2022). Health Literacy.
<https://www.hrsa.gov/about/organization/bureaus/ohe/health-literacy#:~:text=Personal%20health%20literacy%20is%20the,actions%20for%20themselves%20and%20others>
- Rao, P. (2007, May 1st). Health Literacy: The cornerstone of patient safety.
<https://doi.org/10.1044/leader.FTR1.1206.2007.8>