“HOW TO PRESENT DATA TO LOW LITERACY POPULATIONS”

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Outline

- Introduction
- What is Health Literacy?
- The Message
- The Audience
- Communication Strategies:
  - Plain Language & Readability
  - Layout/Design & Visual Data
- Tools & Resources
Introduction

We are living in a high information culture!

- Need literacy skills in today’s world
- Health literacy can lead to awareness, empowerment, and self-efficacy
What is Health Literacy?

- “...ability to read, understand, and act on health care information.” (CHCS, 2000)
- “...ability to make sense of information in any form in which it is presented.” (Nelson & Parvanta, 2011)

Types:

- functional, prose, document, quantitative - health numeracy
Low Health Literacy

- Affects different types of people (e.g. low income, immigrants, older population)

- Inability to read and/or interpret health information can lead to poorer health outcomes
Public Health Objectives…

- Increase health literacy
- Improve health communication!
Health Communication: The *Message*

- Delivers the key health behaviour
- Data can be written, visual, oral, etc.

- Keep it **CLEAR** and **SIMPLE**

  “Sticky Idea”
  - easy to understand
  - easy to remember
  - changes opinions/values/behaviour
Health Communication: The Audience

- Laypersons → patients, communities, remote/rural populations, etc.
- Audience as information processors
- Assess their knowledge and skills (needs assessment)
- Know your audience and the context - connect with their values
- Culturally-competent messaging
- Engage the audience
Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Use **Plain Language**
  - plain language is simple language
  - use active voice and action verbs
  - be less technical and more direct
  - incorporate readability/usability

“Well, yes, I suppose I could explain the test results in ‘plain English’ — but then you’d know how sick you are.”
"living room language" - use ordinary language/analogies to explain complex health processes

E.g. Losing Weight Safely (http://www.plainlanguage.gov)

Before:
The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.

After:
Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.
Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Assess Readability

  - limit # of words (15 - 20 per sentence)
  - limit # of syllables (< 3 per word)
  - large font, bold words, etc.
Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Assess Readability (cont’d)
  - Grade 6-7 level on Flesch-Kincaid scale
  - Consider English proficiency of the audience
  - Pre-test materials with the audience
  - Readability checklists

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**Document Complexity Level**
(Circle total score below to determine a document’s complexity level)

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<th>6 7 8</th>
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<td>Very Low</td>
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<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Simple **Layout/Design**
  - organize key points
  - make data easy to follow
  - use headings, bullets, wide margins, etc.
  - incorporate lots of white space!

Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Use **Visual Data**
  - images faster to process than words
  - serve as aids to the text
  - graphs, charts, photographs, drawings, cartoons, etc.
  - keep them simple!
Effective Health Communication Strategies

- Use **Visual Data** (cont’d)
  - one message per visual
  - show *desired* actions vs. undesired ones
  - should be high quality, realistic, and colourful

[Images A and B]
Effective Health Communication Strategies

Some Other Tips:

- Verbal communication - slow down when speaking; use metaphors and stories
- Online communication - conduct usability testing for websites
- Use social networking to access hard-to-reach communities
Effective Health Communication Strategies

Some Other Tips (cont’d):

- Numeric data → use charts, etc. instead of listing statistics
- Repetition of key points is important
- Use “show me” or “teach back” techniques to check understanding
Effective Health Communication Strategies

Some Other Tips (cont’d):

- Clarify: Ask “What questions do you have?” vs. “Do you have any questions?”
- Collaborate with others to produce effective materials
- Don’t make assumptions about low literacy populations; maintain adult perspective
Tools & Further Resources

- Readability tests/formulas: Microsoft Word functions, Fry Index, SMOG, etc.
- Toolkits about health literacy, plain language, creating easy-to-understand materials
- CDC public health image database

http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp
Conclusion

KEEP IT SIMPLE.

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

~Leonardo da Vinci


