What is health literacy?
- Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Some Health Literacy Facts
- 36% of U.S. adults were found to have basic or below basic health literacy skills.
- Two thirds of U.S. adults age 60 and over have inadequate literacy skills.
- 81% of patients age 60 and older at a public hospital could not read or understand prescription labels.
- Emergency room patients with inadequate literacy are twice as likely to be hospitalized as those with adequate literacy.

Individuals with low health literacy...
- report poorer health outcomes
- are less likely to comply with treatment
- experience higher mortality rates
- are less likely to use preventative care
- are more likely to be hospitalized

What are barriers in the health literacy environment of hospitals?
- Confusing signs, jargon filled documents often written at a college level.
- Complex health information.
- Staff and physicians use medical jargon.

Project Aim: Test a Collaborative Model Between Hospitals and Adult Literacy Students to Identify Health Literacy Barriers and Propose Solutions

Methods
- 15 students from Omega School, a provider of basic adult education, were trained as health literacy consultants to St. Mary’s Hospital in Madison Wisconsin.
- Students and a hospital staff independently critiqued a hospital documents for readability and assessed the ease of navigating through the hospital.
- Students and staff used Rima Rudd’s “The Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals & Health Centers” for the assignment.
- Focus groups comprised of hospital staff and students prioritized barriers and identified feasible solutions.

Results
- Created a successful partnership between a health care system and an adult literacy program.
- Hospital received unique, frank feedback from students.
- Specific problems were identified, solutions proposed.
- Students learned about the hospital environment.
- Students became more empowered to advocate for themselves.

Lessons Learned
- Create a sense of trust.
- Timing can be critical.
- Don’t promise what you can’t deliver.
- Prepare partners for a lot of work.
- Secure executive support.
- Create a shared base of knowledge about health literacy.
- Identify shared goals and problems at the beginning.
- Address needs of both organizations.
- Use existing relationships.
- Launch the project with an event.
- Achieving an authentic “walk through” experience for students is challenging.

Going Forward
- Build on current partnership between St. Mary’s Hospital and The Omega School.
- Create written toolkit so model can be replicated in other settings.
- Disseminate tool kit.

Partners
- Wisconsin Literacy, Inc.
- Confident Conversations, LLC
- Omega School

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