Effective Partnerships between Literacy Organizations and Hospitals: Reducing Health Literacy Barriers for All Patients

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Wisconsin Health Literacy Summit
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Can I park here?
What would happen if we sought the perspective of adult learners?

Could literacy organizations and hospitals partner to improve the health literacy environment?

Could we apply concepts of universal design?
Improving the health literacy environment of Wisconsin hospitals – a collaborative model

Project sponsors and supporters: AAFP, St. Mary's Hospital, MetaStar, WHA
Project goals

Test a collaborative model
- St. Mary’s Hospital staff team
- Omega School students

Identify health literacy barriers
- Assessment of written materials, hospital walk-through
- Roundtable dialogue

Recommend improvements
- Changes to health literacy environment
- Process for future collaboration
Study design

Target population

• **Project focus:**
  St. Mary’s Hospital patients with low literacy or limited English skills

• **Project reach:**
  Wisconsin hospitals and their patients
  Wisconsin literacy member programs

Methods

• Common areas of study

• Adaptation of assessment tool

• Internal and external evaluation teams

• Roundtable dialogue and focus group feedback
Assessment tool

The Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals and Health Centers
Partners for Action:
Making Your Healthcare Facility Literacy-Friendly

Rima E. Rudd Principal Investigator, Health Literacy Studies
Harvard School of Public Health
National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy
When words get in the way

Confusing words
- Consent
- Acknowledge
- Facility
- Authorize
- Party

Better words
- Give permission
- Understand
- Hospital, clinic
- Allow
- Someone else

Conditions of Admission Agreement
- Confidential
- Precertification
- Device
- Utilize

Private
- Pre-approve
- Equipment
- Use

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Say what you mean

Advanced directive
Declaration to physician
Pastoral Care

Bioethics Task Team
DPOA
Bioethics Committee
Resource

Legal and Ethical Decisions

Do not resuscitate
Catastrophic illness

DNR Order
Persistent Vegetative State

Confident Conversations
Making sense of the maze

- Color coding of signs
- Use of symbols, maps, subway or mall kiosks
- “You are here” signs
- Focus on central elevator system with maps
- Signage inside and outside the elevators
- Clearly delineate staff and patient/staff elevators
- Address branding confusion
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>St. Mary’s Hospital</th>
<th>Omega School Students</th>
<th>Partnership</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>• unique, unvarnished feedback</td>
<td>• learned more about the health care system and how to communicate more effectively</td>
<td>• unique forum to describe and explore recurring, systemic issues and to identify potential solutions to benefit all patients</td>
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<td>• specific recommendations for improvement</td>
<td>• empowered to advocate for themselves</td>
<td>• valuable collaboration</td>
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From the hospital’s point of view

“The student team and employees unfamiliar with the clinical environment encountered comparable difficulties in the document review and way finding scenarios. St. Mary’s Hospital understands that trust is a foundation of exceptional care, and because of this, we strive to provide a healing environment that is open and inviting to diverse patients from all walks of life…Therein lies the real value of this health literacy project—the experience reinforced for our team the importance of listening to those we serve and seeing things from the patient perspective, and allowed us to examine new ways to build trust with our customers.”

Matt Albert, CQI Director, St. Mary’s Hospital
From the literacy organization’s point of view:

Students considered health care as possible profession.

Hospital staff were made aware that there could be many others with reading difficulties that they had not considered.

The GED students gained confidence and spoke more freely once it became clear that the hospital "really wanted to hear what they had to say."

Oscar Mireles, Omega School Executive Director
Continuing the work

*How Well Do Your Patients Understand? Improving the Health Literacy Environment of Hospitals*

*Improving the Health Literacy of Hospitals: A Collaborative Guide for Literacy Organizations*

See [www.healthliteracywisconsin.org](http://www.healthliteracywisconsin.org)
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