Health Literacy Universal Precautions

What are health literacy universal precautions?

Health literacy universal precautions refer to a **systematic approach used in health care to ensure health information is communicated effectively** to all patients, regardless of their level of health literacy. It assumes every patient may have difficulty at some time understanding health information and taking steps to address this potential challenge.

Key Principles

Clear communication: Use plain language. Avoid jargon, technical terms and complex medical terminology. Strive to present information in a way that is easy for patients to understand.

Active listening: Actively listen to patients' questions and concerns, encouraging them to ask questions and express any confusion they may have.

Confirmation of understanding: Confirm patients' understanding by asking them to repeat back key information or by using teach-back techniques. This ensures comprehension of the information presented to them.

Visual aids and multimedia: Use visual aids (e.g., diagrams, illustrations, videos) to enhance understanding, especially for patients with limited literacy skills or language barriers.

Cultural sensitivity: Recognize and respect cultural differences that may impact patients' health beliefs, attitudes and practices. Tailor communication to diverse cultural backgrounds.

Accessible formats: Present information in formats accessible to patients with disabilities (e.g., large print, audio recordings, braille).

Why are health literacy universal precautions important?

Health literacy universal precautions are essential to ensure health care communication is inclusive, understandable and effective for all patients, regardless of their literacy levels or background. By implementing these precautions, health care providers can:

Provide equity in health care access by ensuring everyone receives clear and understandable information.

Quality Improvement Organizations
Sharing Knowledge. Improving Health Care.
CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES
Comagine Health

This material was prepared by Comagine Health for the American Indian Alaska Native Healthcare Quality Initiative under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of CMS or HHS, and any reference to a specific product or entity herein does not constitute endorsement of that product or entity by CMS or HHS. NQIIC-AIHQI-574-05/29/2024

Improve patient outcomes through clear communication so patients adhere to treatment plans, manage chronic conditions effectively and make informed decisions about their health.

Reduce medical errors by promoting clear and simple communication practices that minimize misunderstandings.

Enhance patient satisfaction leading to better patient-provider relationships and improved healthcare experiences.

Promote participation in public health initiatives through empowering individuals to make healthier choices.

Who should use universal precautions?

Health literacy universal precautions should be used **by all health care providers, regardless of their patients' presumed level of health literacy.**

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)'s Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit offers evidence-based guidance to help health care providers make health information easier to understand and act on, make health care easier to navigate and increase support for patients of all health literacy levels.