Developing Health Literacy Partnerships:

Literacy and health care organizations working together to enhance patient safety

Jeff Burkhart, Executive Director
Literacy Network of Dane County
Madison, WI
Jeff@litnetwork.org
www.litnetwork.org
What is the strongest predictor of individual health status?

A) age
B) income
C) education level
D) employment status
E) racial or ethnic group
F) literacy skills
What is the strongest predictor of individual health status?

A) age  
B) income  
C) education level  
D) employment status  
E) racial or ethnic group  
F) literacy skills
Literacy Levels and Health Outcomes

- About 36% of all Americans have basic or below basic health literacy skills. They cannot use a graph to determine a healthy weight range or read prescription labels.

- "Non-compliant" patients who do not follow discharge instructions often lack the literacy skills to do so.
2003 Health Literacy Assessment
(from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy)

Basic and Below Basic Health Literacy

– White 28%
– Native Americans 48%
– Blacks 58%
– Hispanics 66%
Advancing Health Literacy

- Literacy Network’s *English for Health* class is designed for high beginning to low intermediate ESL students.

- All classes take place in hospitals and clinics.
English for Health

• A 12-week, 48-hour program
• Program includes: finding a doctor, basic medical vocabulary, medications, and communication with healthcare professionals
Program Framework

Learners engage in hands-on project-based activities, using English to talk about their health.
Program Framework

Learners practice new language skills in authentic situations with members of the healthcare community in a mock clinic.
Outcomes

• 85% of students increased health-related knowledge and reported increases in practice of health habits

• All student demonstrated increased knowledge and comfort after attending mock clinic

• Students learned about health care systems and health care options for the uninsured
Partnership Steps: 2009

• Latino Health Council endorsed program

• St Mary’s Hospital hosts class, provides financial and in-kind support

• UW School of Pharmacy students developed projects, curriculum
Partners are Essential

• Panels about accessing health care from area providers build more personal connections

• Nutritionist from **Willy Street Grocery Co-op** help students plan healthy low-cost meals, and support the program with a grant
What makes a Healthy Partnership?

• It starts at the top: leadership support
• Acknowledgment that they benefit
• Good advanced planning
• Emphasis on common goals
• Joint leadership on issues
What makes a Healthy Partnership?

- Agreement on times, locations
- Complete a memorandum of understanding between organizations
- Commitment of staff to provide input
- Having a point person (usually a “community involvement” management position)
Partnership Steps: 2011

• **Humana** grant funds program expansion in 2011

• **Group Health Cooperative, St. Mary’s Hospital, UW Health, Wingra Community Health Center and Dean Health** host program

• **UW School of Medicine** students serve as classroom tutors
Partnership Steps: 2011

- **United Way** Safe and Healthy Aging: improving toolkit with usability testing
- **UW School of Medicine:** Students are paid consultants
- **Health Literacy conferences:** presentations with students
Contact info:

Jeff Burkhart  
Executive Director  
Jeff@litnetwork.org

Beth Gaytan  
Health Literacy Director  
Beth@litnetwork.org

608-244-3911  
www.litnetwork.org