MODULE 15: ORAL HEALTH ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Oral Health Across the Lifespan
Part 5: Oral Health Literacy

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Learning Objectives

• Define oral health literacy
• Recognize patients who may have low oral health literacy and list several behaviors that may be indicative of limited health literacy
• Describe how to improve oral health literacy using principles of effective communication
• Describe resources that can be given to patients to improve oral health literacy and where they can seek appropriate care
Healthy People 2020 Objectives

- Recognize that oral health literacy is a problem that needs to be addressed
- Reduce disparities in access to oral health care.
- Increase the proportion of adults who receive preventive interventions in primary care and dental offices
- Increase the proportion of local health departments and federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) that have an oral health program
Health Literacy

• The cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health. (WHO, 2014)
What is Oral Health Literacy?

“The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic oral health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”
Oral Health - The Statistics

- Illnesses related to oral health result in 6.1 million days of bed disability and 20.5 million lost workdays each year. (AGD, 2014)
- About 1 in 4 nonelderly adults also have untreated tooth decay.
  - The rate of untreated decay among low-income adults is twice that for adults with a higher income (41 percent versus 19 percent). (AGD, 2014)
- Nationally, only 44 percent of adults with less than basic health literacy skills had a dental visit in the preceding year compared with 77 percent of those with proficient health literacy skills (IOM, 2013)
Lower Oral Health Literacy = Increased Health Costs

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital-based emergency department (ED) visits involving dental conditions, according to study year.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOSPITAL-BASED ED VISITS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All ED Visits Across the Entire United States, No.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ED Visits Involving Dental Conditions, No.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental caries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pulp and periapical lesions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gingival conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Periodontal conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth cellulitis or abscess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any of the above dental conditions* (percentage of all ED visits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Any single ED visit may have involved one or more dental conditions. The sum of individual dental conditions will be more than the global total of dental-care–related ED visits for the year.

Allareddy V, Rampa S, Lee MK, Allareddy V, Nalliah P. Hospital based emergency department visits involving dental conditions. JADA 2014;145(4):3331-337
Why is Oral Health Literacy Important?

- Individual patients and health care providers are largely unaware of the basic risk factors and preventive regimens for many oral diseases.
- Individuals with lower oral health literacy are more likely to:
  - have poor health
  - use fewer preventive services
  - Use more costly emergency department services.
Challenges in Healthcare

- Address the mismatch between the demands of the healthcare system and the skills of the those using and working in the healthcare system(s)

Adapted from Nuts & Bolts: (Why) Oral Health Literacy by Alice Horowitz
Who is at Risk for Low Oral Health Literacy?

- Lower level of educations
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- People with special health care needs
- Older adults
- Pregnant women
- Lower socioeconomic status

Low Health Literacy - The Effects on Oral Health

Low dental IQ can lead to:

- Lack of compliance- missed dental appointments, lack of follow up for an urgent conditions because of the inability to understand instructions, inability to take medications as prescribed

- Seeking only urgent care instead of preventive care which can lead to exacerbation of some chronic conditions

- Missed opportunities to speak to health care providers about smoking cessation, screening for oral cancer and even benefits of fluoride in children

- Share personal information that may affect the management of chronic conditions

- Difficulty articulating signs and symptoms so the health care provider has a clear understanding of the underlying problem.
How Can Healthcare Providers Improve Communication with Patients?

- Listen to what patients have to say
- Try the teach back method - patient repeats what you say
- Talk Slowly
- Use pictures and models when appropriate
- Use non medical language
Mrs. Smith you have Type 2 Diabetes along with severe periodontitis. Your glucose is 200 and your HgA1C is 9.0. Uncontrolled diabetes can worsen your periodontitis. This can lead to edentulism and even a systemic infection if you do not get your glucose under control.

Mrs. Smith you have Type 2 diabetes along with severe inflammation of your gums and ligaments around your teeth. Your blood sugar is very high (200) and the number that tracks your sugar over the past three months, called HgA1C, is also high (9.0). If your blood sugar stays this elevated it can make the inflammation around your gums much worse. If this happens you can eventually lose your teeth and even develop an infection in your blood.
What Can Healthcare Providers do to Help Each Other?

COLLABORATE

• During annual physicals, primary care providers can do a thorough oral exam and refer when needed
Call to Action


Health Literacy Government Resources

- National Action Plan for Health Literacy
- CDC Health Literacy: Accurate, Assessable and Actionable Health Information for All
- National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center
Cultural Competency Program for Oral Health Professionals (CCPOHP)

- Small Group Program is designed to be delivered live and in-person to small groups of oral health professionals
- Sponsored by Health and Human Services
- https://oralhealth.thinkkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/
Prevention is Key

- Overall health
- Oral Health