Take Action to Improve Health Literacy

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Description

The MN Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy and additional resources available on the Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership website can independently guide the student and practicing health professional seeking a strong foundation on health literacy principles.

Many of these resources offer the knowledge needed to transpire values, skills and action. Engaging the student in application opportunities is key to encouraging health literacy practices and advocacy at the patient, clinic and system level.

Competencies

C2. Effective Communication and Health Literacy

- C2.1. Health Literacy
  - Name one or more definitions of health literacy.
  - Identify the basic literacy skill domains (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and numeracy) and examples of health care related demands put on patients for each domain, including difficulties navigating health care systems.
  - Differentiate between the ability to read and reading comprehension, and why general reading levels do not ensure patient understanding.
  - Summarize the prevalence of low or limited health literacy among U.S. adults, and the increased risk of certain subgroups.
  - Recall that the average U.S. adult reads at a 5th grade reading level, but that most patient education materials are written at a much higher reading level.
  - Understand that adults with low or limited health literacy tend to experience shame, and hide their lack of skills from oral health care providers.
  - Understand that it is not possible to determine a patient’s health literacy skills by their appearance.
  - Recognize “red flag” behaviors which may suggest a patient has low or limited health literacy.
  - Recall that tools are available for estimating individuals’ health literacy skills, but that routine screening for low or limited health literacy has not been proven safe or acceptable.
  - Recall health literacy is context-specific and may change from one clinic visit to the next (e.g. during times of physical or emotional stress).
  - Express attitude that everyone regardless of literacy level benefits from and prefers clear communication.
TAKE ACTION TO IMPROVE HEALTH LITERACY

- Recognize that patient stressful life events and transitioning across health systems, insurance carriers, or providers are especially vulnerable times for communication errors needing closer attention and follow-up.
- Understand importance, rationale, and principles of a universal precautions approach in all health communication interactions.
- Describe best practice principles of clear communication, plain language, accessibility (508 compliance), numeracy, cultural competency, informed consent, and patient-centered care.
- Describe the direct relationship between health literacy and knowledge about one’s chronic disease(s) and medications, adherence to medications and treatment plans, receipt of preventive health services, health outcomes or risk of harm, and excess healthcare costs.
- Recognize ethical and legal implications for inadequately conveying health information to patients with low or limited literacy or health literacy.

- C3. Administrative and Management Practice
  - Develop a written strategic plan that outlines clear goals, policies, operational plans, and management accountability/oversight mechanisms to provide equitable and culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

Learning Outcomes

- Apply strategies to improve health literacy at all levels (patient, clinic and organization) in a variety of healthcare settings.
- Recognize that promoting health literacy change and taking action within a clinic or organization requires intraprofessional and interprofessional team collaboration, initiative, innovation and effective planning.

Activity

Assign required readings or viewings to include White Papers and Articles

- Minnesota Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (March 2016)
- Bridging the Gap: Taking Action on Health Literacy in Minnesota (PowerPoint)
- Health Literacy Toolkit (2016)

Create relevant student-generated lists and class discussion to identify practical health literacy tips and takeaways from these resources. Focus on examples of application at the patient, clinic and organizational levels. As a follow up to class discussion, require student teams to identify a hypothetical health literacy patient, clinic or organizational issue that needs addressing and design an action plan to resolve the problem. Team designed scenarios and action plans should be shared to encourage collaborative learning and enhance activity outcomes.
Student Assessment

One’s health literacy level of understanding achieved by this activity is assessed by determining the variety, quality and practicality of the individual student’s health literacy tips and takeaways list. Each item on the list is described accurately and comprehensively and is referenced as a Partnership website resource.

Applicability of health literacy principles and practices can be assessed when student teams present scenarios requiring health literacy interventions. Measure if the strategy directly addresses the health literacy issue at the appropriate level and is likely to accomplish the intended outcome. Student feedback on classmates’ presentations will encourage peer discussion and collaborative learning.

Resources

Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership Website https://healthliteracymn.org/
Papers and Articles, https://healthliteracymn.org/resources/papers-and-articles

*Minnesota Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy* (March 2016)

*Bridging the Gap: Taking Action on Health Literacy in Minnesota* (PowerPoint)

*Health Literacy Toolkit* (2016)

Suggested Placement within Curriculum

Utilizing resources from the Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership Website should be initiated early within any healthcare curriculum to provide a foundation on which to build student knowledge, establish values and foster clinical application.

Focusing on experiential application of health literacy principles and practices should occur when the student is beginning their clinical education and carried on throughout the curriculum with patient care delivery.

Community Health projects offer the ideal opportunity to apply health literacy strategies within a community program or at an organizational level.