

**Health Literacy in Communities Prototype Collaborative
Get Real: Partnerships for Moving Health Literacy Forward
December 10th, 2009**

The contribution of the literacy learner & literacy program in improving health literacy

The Health Literacy in Communities Prototype Collaborative brought teams together from around the province to test changes in literacy organizations and office practices with the aim of improving health literacy in communities. The prototype wrapped up December 10th, 2009 with a closing event in Vancouver, BC, where teams shared their learnings, and policy makers, health care professionals, community organization representatives, and others interested in improving health literacy met to determine next steps to move health literacy forward in the province.

Dr. Marina Niks (Douglas College), Dr. Lori Walker (2010 Legacies Now) and Leona Gadsby (2010 Legacies Now) facilitated a discussion around the contribution of the literacy learner and literacy program in improving health literacy. Below are summary notes from this session.

How do we empower literacy learners to engage health care professionals and how can we help health care professionals understand the needs of learners (including English language learners)?

- Improving health literacy is a two way street – health care professionals need to recognize this and capacity needs to be built in patient populations.
- There is a direct correlation between cost of health care and levels of health literacy – policy and decision makers need to be engaged.
- There is a need to pool resources and collaborate between the literacy community, and health care community (e.g. Health Literacy in Communities Prototype Collaborative). What more can we do?

How can we empower literacy learners?

- Develop health prompt cards (successful PDSA in Tri-Cities) across the province.
- Address self esteem and self confidence in learners, along with sense of self efficacy; i.e. we have control over our health outcomes.
- Help learners to understand their rights.
- What helps learners in their health visits? – Identify simple steps to assist learners

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- Health literacy learning is just like any form of learning; it needs to be relevant and timely for both learners and health care professionals.
- Questions to consider:
 - What do learners do when the system or health care professionals “shut them down?”
 - What challenges to health care professionals encounter?
 - What are strategies for dealing with these challenges and barriers?
- Learners need to know it is okay to ask for clarification when there are issues they don't understand.
- Discharge summaries help literacy learners; having a piece of paper to take away is useful.

Supporting Health Care Professionals to address Health Literacy Needs

- Health care professionals need to hear learners' voices.
- Utilize the Medical Office Assistant by understanding their work world to determine how they can support health literacy.
- We need to understand the issues that determine how a visit unfolds, such as time, learner's comprehension, why rules exist (e.g. one question per visit).
- The tough, hard to talk about questions need to be asked.
- Importance of supporting self management:
 - Bounce Back Program (<http://www.cmha.bc.ca/bounceback>) includes modeling, check-ins, structured problem solving; programs like this need to be shared.
- Importance of understanding different learning styles - more visuals in the office practice will help learners (pictures of bodies – point to where it hurts the most basic example). Patients could be coached to tell doctors what kind of learner they are and how things make sense to them.
- Physicians need time and need to take time to explain.
- Curriculum in Medical and Nursing School should include health literacy, and learning about learners/ adults with low literacy.
- Possibilities of partnering with other health care professionals (e.g. work with pharmacists – what might their role be? How do they view health literacy? What resources do they have to share?)
- Encourage innovative practice – group visits, navigator role, follow-up

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- Medical Records should include a “Literacy Field” score or indicator of literacy needs.
- Can elements of the health literacy collaborative be implemented into the Practice Support Program?
- Literacy Programs and Services need to be funded. Literacy is a solution to many problems, not just another social issue to be tackled.

Supporting and Utilizing Literacy Practitioners and Resources

- Local and regional coordination allows the dissemination of ideas and engages interested parties to collaborate and share resources.
- Richmond program gives physicians prescription pads to recommend what to read up on in the library. <http://www.yourlibrary.ca/health>

- Develop and share resource list of programs and ideas for those who support low level learners around health literacy
- Literacy Outreach Coordinators work with a wide range of partners to coordinate services.
- Work with health care professionals to develop a Health Literacy Inventory Assessment.
- Identify the barriers to using existing resources.