Quality improvement and health literacy

Setting the agenda
Overview

• Who are we?
• What does the Commission mean by health literacy?
• Why is it a safety and quality issue?
• What is going on nationally about health literacy?
• NSQHS Standards and health literacy
About the Commission

- National government organisation
- Funded by Commonwealth and all states and territories
- Leading and improving safety and quality in health care
- Strategic priorities are in the areas of:
  - patient safety
  - partnering with patients, consumers and communities
  - quality cost and value
  - supporting health professionals to provide safe and high-quality care.
How the Commission sees health literacy...
## A complex health literacy environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>35 years ago</th>
<th>Today</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment of acute myocardial infarction</td>
<td>4-6 weeks bed rest in hospital</td>
<td>2-4 days in hospital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Available prescription drugs</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>More than 10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment of new onset diabetes</td>
<td>3 weeks in hospital</td>
<td>Outpatient</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 hours a day of diabetic education classes</td>
<td>Up to 3 hours diabetic education classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Written materials / internet / telemedicine</td>
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<td>Treatment of asthma</td>
<td>Theophylline</td>
<td>Inhalers with spacers</td>
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<td>Controlled vs rescue meds</td>
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<td>Peak flow monitoring</td>
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<td>Tapering steroids</td>
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<td>Trigger avoidance</td>
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Individual health literacy in Australia

• 59% of Australians have a level of individual health literacy that is below the “minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life”

• 20-44 year olds had the highest levels of individual health literacy, with lower rates for those aged 15-19 years and 45 years and older

• Around 75% of those who spoke English as second language had lower levels of individual health literacy
What is the impact?

- People with low levels of individual health literacy:
  - more likely to have poorer outcomes
  - less likely to use preventive services
  - more likely to be hospitalised
  - poorer medication adherence
  - poorer knowledge and understanding of their own condition
  - less likely to attend appointments
  - for older people – poorer overall health status and higher risk of death

Bush et al. *Advancing Health Literacy Through Primary Health Care Systems*, 2010
Health literacy and ability to interpret labels on pharmaceuticals

Health literacy and use of EDs by older people

Health literacy and mortality in older people

What is the cost?

- Potential economic impact of lower health literacy:
  - at a system level: an increase of 3-5% of total health spending
  - at an individual level: between US$143 – US$7798 increased spending per person

What has the Commission been doing?

• National health literacy stock take 2011-12:
  • 66 submissions – over 200 separate initiatives

• Many different organisations doing work to improve health literacy
• A range of different approaches being used
• Efforts fragmented with little potential for learning
Stocktake:
Types of strategies and approaches

- Health information: 49%
- Research and knowledge sharing: 21%
- Building individual health literacy: 14%
- Workforce training: 7%
- Health literacy environment: 5%
- Policy or framework: 4%
- Health information: 49%
Health literacy: Background paper and national statement

• Raising awareness
• Discussing the concept and related issues
• Advocating for a coordinated approach
• Outlining the role that different individuals and organisations can play
• Describing actions that can be taken
A coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing health literacy
Strategies for addressing health literacy - systems

• Embedding health literacy into systems:
  • high level systems – standards, curricula, government policy
  • organisational policies and procedures
Strategies for addressing health literacy - communication

• Ensuring effective communication:
  • appropriate health-related information
  • information when people need it, and in the form that they need it
  • effective interpersonal communication – education and recall, shared decision-making
Strategies for addressing health literacy - education

• Integrating health literacy into education:
  • education and training for consumers about health and health literacy – children and adults
  • education and training about health literacy for healthcare providers – needs vary depending on role
  • education and training to improve communication
Everyone has a role in addressing health literacy

| Consumers, patients and families | • Discuss with healthcare providers any difficulties in understanding information  
| • Ask for more information about any part of care that is unclear |
| Healthcare providers | • Assume most people will have difficulty understanding and applying complex health knowledge and concepts  
| • Use a range of communication strategies to ensure information is understood |
| Healthcare organisations | • Develop and implement health literacy policies and programs |
| Governments | • Raise awareness about health literacy  
| • Embed health literacy principles into health policy development |
| Education and training organisations | • Provide education for healthcare providers about health literacy and communication  
| • Develop education programs for consumers |
National workshop on health literacy – November 2014

- Aim: identify priorities for action on improving health literacy
- Involved consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and researchers
- Issues arising:
  - building health literacy into systems
  - developing and implementing a health information standard
  - supporting and empowering consumers
  - addressing the gap between policy and practice
  - supporting staff to address health literacy through the provision of training and resources
NSQHS Standards v1
NSQHS Standards v2: Expanded partnerships standard

- Criterion 1: Governance systems
- Criterion 2: Health literacy
- Criterion 3: Partnering with consumers in their own care
- Criterion 4: Partnering with consumers in organisational design and governance
**NSQHS Standards v2: Health literacy actions**

- Information is tailored to the diversity of the consumers who use the services and, where relevant the local population.

- Where information for consumers developed internally, involve consumers.

- Clinicians provide consumers with information about health and health care that:
  - is easy to understand and use and is in a format that meets their needs.
  - includes information about treatment and options, risks and benefits, the care plan, what they need to do after leaving the organisation, and managing their medicines, where relevant.
Where to next? Nationally

• Long term strategies required

• Opportunities for coordinated national action to:
  • raise profile of health literacy
  • integrate health literacy into policies and programs
  • examine how best to measure health literacy
  • support health care organisations and providers to improve health literacy environment
  • examine how consumer organisations can support efforts to address health literacy
  • promote research that addresses health literacy
Where to next? Locally

• Opportunities at a local level to:
  • understand the diversity of your population and that a significant proportion are likely to have low individual health literacy
  • reflect health literacy in organisational policy framework and programs
  • provide training to the workforce
  • ensure that information is provided to consumers in a way that is appropriate and able to be understood
  • support use of communication strategies tailored to individual needs
Summary

• Health literacy is a safety and quality issue

• There has been a lot of work in Australia for some time, but it has been fragmented

• Now have a national approach based on:
  • embedding health literacy into systems
  • ensuring effective communication
  • integrating health literacy into education

• NSQHS Standards will have a greater focus on health literacy

• Everyone has a role in addressing health literacy

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