



LEAP Online

Learning Excellence Achievement Pathway Online Tutorial

Health Literacy: What's it got to do with me?

Let's explore:

- What is health literacy?
- Why it matters
- What can we do to help?

Take time to reflect

How would you define health literacy?

The World Health Organisation defines health literacy as:

"Health literacy refers to the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information services to make decisions about health. Health literacy includes the capacity to communicate, assert and enact these decisions."

In a nutshell, Health Literacy is a person's ability to access, understand and act on health information. (Nutbeam, 1998)

Let's look at some facts and figures around health literacy

The image below details the percentage of adults aged 16 – 65 years for whom health information is too complex.

This refers to text and numeracy components of health materials.



National average: 61% (Rowlands, 2015)

How does this affect the people of Bolton?

It's estimated that the level of low health literacy in Bolton is 49.34%

Percentage of population aged 16 – 64 years (<http://healthliteracy.geodata.uk>)

And estimated level of low health literacy and numeracy in Bolton is 68.24%

Percentage of population aged 16 – 64 years (<http://healthliteracy.geodata.uk>)

The percentage of people in Bolton with poor health literacy is high.

Why does health literacy matter?

Let's think about who are most likely to be affected by health literacy issues.

- People living with socio-economic disadvantage
- People with low educational attainment
- Older people
- People who have a long-term health condition
- People with disabilities
- People with sensory impairment
- People with low information and technology skills

Take time to reflect

Think of examples of when you may have encountered health literacy issues or examples from friends and family.

Most people will have health literacy needs at some time during their life, regardless of their skill level e.g. stress, becoming a new parent, getting a scary diagnosis – even the most well educated people may struggle in these circumstances.

Poor health literacy has a number of personal impacts:

- Unhealthy behaviours: alcohol, poor diet, smoking, lack of exercise
- Lower levels of self-rated health
- Lower response to public health campaigns

In addition, poor health literacy has a number of impacts on the health system:

- Inappropriate decisions for the patient
- Missed appointments
- Wasted medication
- Inappropriate use of services

Why aren't people expressing these concerns?

- 52% "I don't know who to raise concerns with"
- 33% "I don't want to be seen as a trouble maker"
- 37% "I don't think it would make a difference"
- 28% "I don't think I'll be taken seriously"

The most common reasons for raising, or wanting to raise, a concern are:

- Delays to an appointment
- Delays to a service
- Lack of information
- Poor patient care

Understanding health information can have a huge impact on people's ability to stay healthy and manage illnesses effectively, giving them/you a better quality of life.

What can we do to help?

- Check the information been communicated well – clear, jargon free language?
- Check understanding - this ensures confirmation of knowledge
- Be approachable and invite questions

In summary

All this allows society (you and me) to be knowledgeable and empowered in decision making. This is key to the welfare of everyone whether they are family, friends or service users.

Acknowledgements

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References

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World Health Organization. (2020) *Health Literacy*. [Online] Available from: <https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/themes/health-literacy> [Accessed 2 July 2020]

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