

# Introducing Health Literacy Basics to Nursing Students

Karen R. Hernes, MSN, RN, CNE

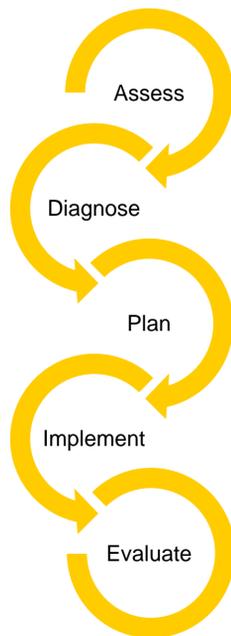
Purdue University Northwest

## Introduction

With over 2.5 million registered nurses working in U.S. healthcare settings, nurses are often in the best position to assist the 90 million Americans with low health literacy levels (Sand-Jecklin, 2010; Mahadevan, 2013). Many nurses have not been educated about health literacy, and there are no standards for including health literacy in a nursing curriculum, yet studies have shown that even a brief introduction of health literacy to nursing students can be effective (Sand-Jecklin, 2010). This poster describes one example of a class session that engaged new nursing students in a conversation about the concept of health literacy.

**Target Population:** Sophomore Nursing Students in a Bachelor of Science, Nursing Program in the Midwest

**Educational Format:** As Smith and Zsohar (2011) suggested, a variety of strategies were used to introduce the concept of health literacy. The 60 minute session included a PowerPoint lecture, active learning elements, and videos to teach health literacy basics. The nursing process provided a framework for the lesson.



### Student Learning Objectives:

- Define health literacy
- Assess health literacy levels in a client
- Diagnose using NANDA Nursing Diagnoses
- Identify barriers to high health literacy
- Plan & Intervene with resources to maximize client learning
- Evaluate client learning
- List the outcomes of low health literacy
- Identify nurses' roles in addressing health literacy

## Assess

Assess your own health literacy level and your client's.

After being administered the Newest Vital Sign, students discussed 3 aspects of health literacy that this test addressed: **words, numbers, and forms** (Pfizer, 2011). Other formal assessment tools were mentioned. Health literacy was defined and explained.

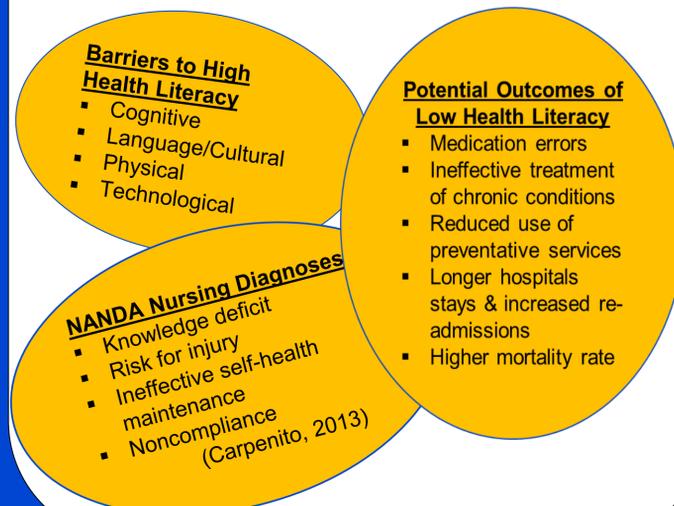
Students worked in pairs, discussing how they informally assessed health literacy levels during their previous health history gathering assignment. Below is a list of students' responses, reflecting the observations they believed may indicate health literacy levels.

"didn't know their meds", "couldn't remember their surgeries and hospitalizations", "their pronunciation of words", "lack of eye contact", "how they described their symptoms", "pronunciations of diagnoses", "level of education", "hearing deficit", "no car", "not vaccinated", "visual deficit", "didn't understand the words I used", "no annual checkup"

## Diagnose

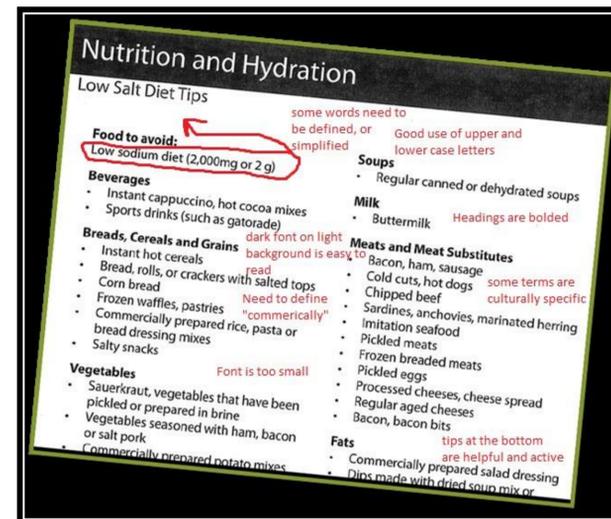
Diagnose, recognize barriers to high health literacy, and list potential outcomes of low health literacy levels.

After viewing the AMA Health Literacy Video - Short Version (2012), students discussed the possible barriers and outcomes listed below. They were presented with possible NANDA Nursing Diagnoses that may fit with low literacy levels.



## Plan & Implement

Plan and implement appropriate client education, adhering to universal health literacy precautions.

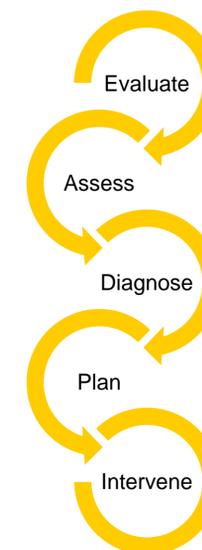


After being given the Health Literacy Fact Sheets to use as a guide, students worked in pairs to evaluate this printed educational client handout, listing strengths and weaknesses (Mahadevan, 2013). They considered how they might verbally communicate the information to clients using universal health literacy precautions. Other best practices for use of pictures, videos, and additional teaching methods were discussed.

## Evaluate

Evaluate client teaching by asking clients to teach back the information. Identify nurses' role in addressing health literacy.

A video demonstrated the Teach-back Method (Allina Health, 2013). Students listed steps for proper teach-back technique, and how to continue the nursing process by assessing after evaluation.



## Outcomes

Faculty peer-evaluation of session: "gave examples to heighten learning", "students actively engaged", "encouraged quality discussion", "well developed topic with interactive component", "dynamic presentation which allowed for student questions and sharing"

Health Literacy quiz questions - over 90% of the class answered the questions correctly

Students' end of semester poster presentations for assisted living clients adhered to universal health literacy precautions, with appropriate content & visuals.

**Outcomes:** Considering quiz scores, poster presentations, and in-class engagement, the Student Learning Objectives were achieved.

**Implications for Practice:** Identifying where the concept of health literacy appears in the new Purdue University Northwest nursing curriculum is a top priority. Evaluation of students' continued use of universal health literacy precautions in the classroom, lab, simulation lab, and clinical settings needs to be standardized. Coleman (2011) notes that because of the absence of health literacy found in nursing literature, health professionals need to develop curriculum and provide well-designed studies to determine effectiveness and the connection to improved client-centered outcomes. Continued research is essential.

## References

- Allina Health. (2013, December 24). *The teach-back method*. [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCNCqA5LqFo>
- American Medical Association. (2012, August 23). *AMA health literacy video - Short version* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubPkdpGHWAQ>
- Carpenito, L. J. (2013). *Nursing diagnosis: Application to clinical practice* (14th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Coleman, C. (2011). Teaching health care professionals about health literacy: A review of the literature. *Nursing Outlook*, 59, 70-78. doi:10.1016/j.outlook.2010.12.004
- Dickens, C. & Plano, M. R. (2013). Health literacy and nursing: An update. *American Journal of Nursing*, 113, 52-58. doi:10.1097/01.NAJ.0000431271.83277.2f
- Mahadevan, R. (2013). *Health literacy fact sheets*. Retrieved April 1, 2015, from <http://www.chcs.org/resource/health-literacy-fact-sheets/>
- Sand-Jecklin, K., Murray, B., Summers, B., & Watson, J. (July 23, 2010). Educating nursing students about health literacy: From the classroom to the client bedside. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 15(3). doi:10.3912/OJIN.Vol15No03PPT02
- Smith, J. & Zsohar, H. (2011). Teaching health literacy in the undergraduate curriculum. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 32, 48-50. doi: 10.5480/1536-5026-32.1.48
- Pfizer. (2011). *The newest vital sign: A health literacy assessment tool*. Retrieved April 1, 2015, from [http://www.pfizer.com/files/health/nvs\\_flipbook\\_english\\_final.pdf](http://www.pfizer.com/files/health/nvs_flipbook_english_final.pdf)

