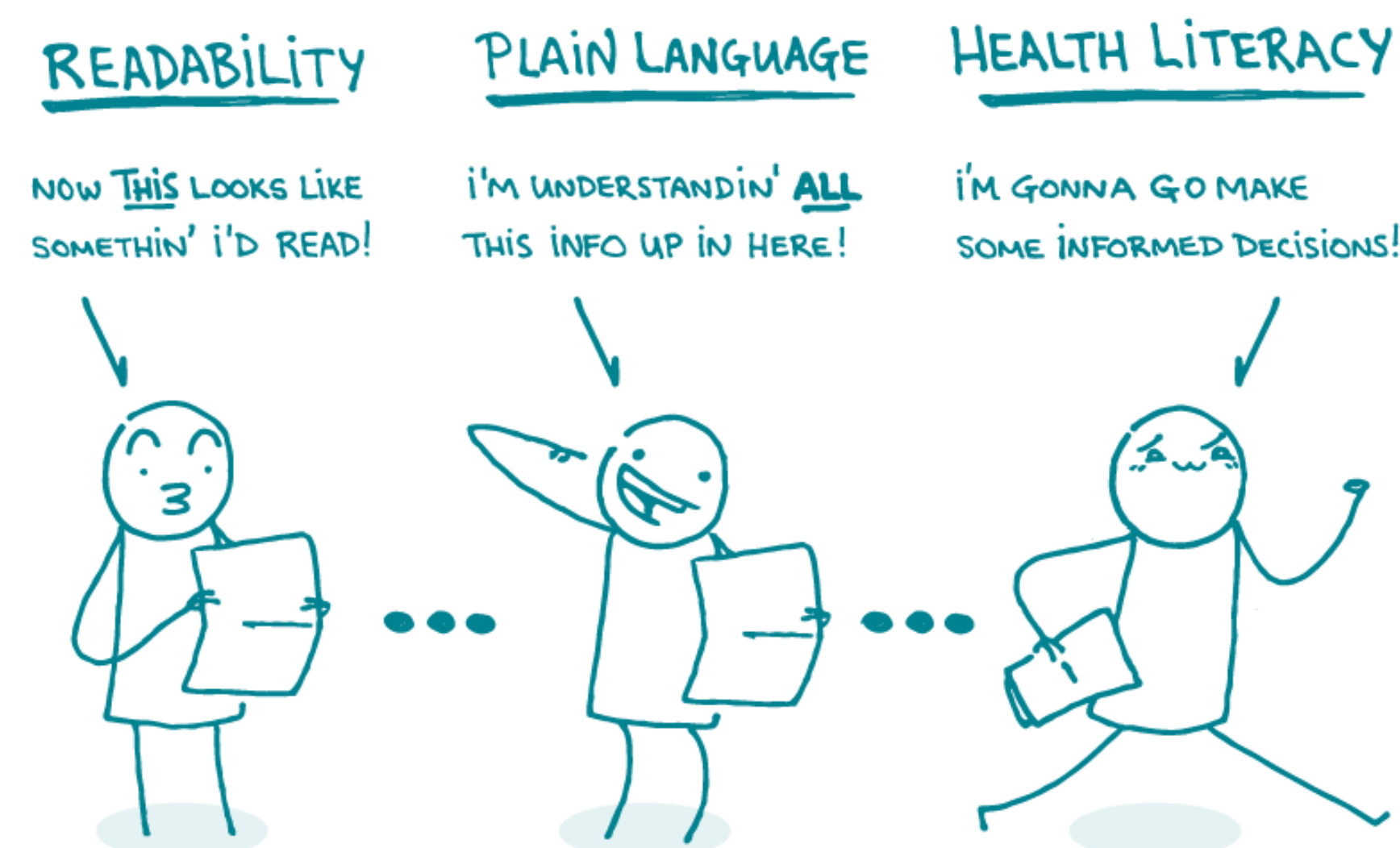


LOW HEALTH LITERACY

- 88% of adults in the United States are below proficient in health literacy which means they are unable to obtain, read, understand, and use healthcare information in order to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment.
- Low health literacy leads to poor health outcomes like high rates of hospitalization and less frequent use of preventative services (2019).
- These patients are unable to understand direction from their physician, cannot read or understand the prescription label on their medications, recognize the nutritional benefits related to their health issues, or how to generally care for their health, thus resulting in continued poor health and potentially suffering from multiple illnesses.



<https://medium.com/wehearthehealthliteracy/readability-and-plain-language-and-health-literacy-oh-my-35d396616d22>

WHO IS AFFECTED?

- The main groups affected by low health literacy are adults of low socioeconomic status including low income and low education, the elderly due to frequent health problems and lower cognitive function, and immigrants in the United States speaking English as a second language.
- 94% of patient education materials are written in an advanced terminology that is beyond most people's ability to fully comprehend

HEALTH LITERACY IN THE U.S.

9 OUT OF 10 ADULTS FAIL TO UNDERSTAND AND USE STANDARD HEALTH INFORMATION

HOW IS THIS A PROBLEM?

- Unable to Read Medicine Labels
- Misunderstand Lab Results
- Miscommunicate with Doctor

This Results In...

- Increased rates of hospitalization
- Higher costs of healthcare
- Decreased use of preventative services
- Poor health management

AS A HEALTH PROFESSIONAL, YOU CAN HELP BY:

- Use Plain Language to Communicate Clearly
- Confirm Understanding
- Account for Culture and Language Barriers

Reference: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019
Health Resources & Services Administration, 2019

RESEARCH

- Socioeconomic status is one of the leading factors resulting in health disparities caused by low health literacy.
 - Low-income, low-education, and race/ethnicity, particularly those of African American or Hispanic decent, contribute most to the research found when categorizing health literacy standards
 - When given the choice, low health literate individuals would place their reliance on social media, television, or blogs as opposed to doctors or medical resources (Chen, et al., 2018).
- As age progresses among the elderly, cognitive function can begin to deteriorate.
 - In assessing these functions using different measures like long-term and working memory, processing speed, reasoning, and verbal ability, researchers found that all health literacy measures were directly connected to cognitive domain (Serper, et al., 2014).
- Individuals speaking English as a second language are highly disadvantaged when attempting to interpret health instructions or follow their doctor's orders.
 - This is in line with the documented decline of health of initially healthy immigrants who experience language difficulties or culturally inaccurate services (Jatrana, Pasupuleti, & Richardson, 2014).

CALL TO ACTION

- Advocate to government legislators to bring awareness to the need for health education in adults.
- Employees of healthcare operations can utilize a standardized format of plain language, communicate properly and ask relevant questions to their patient's health, confirm understanding of medicines or treatment plans, encourage questions in return, and even use charts or graphs to engage interest and increase knowledge.
- Maximize time with individual patients to begin improving health literacy, to gain trust from these patients to continue use of the healthcare system, and encourage health promotion through improved health literacy.

MY ADVOCACY EFFORTS

- I spoke with Health Literacy Media, a communications firm that first began out of St. Louis, MO and branched out to assist health literacy needs across the country.
- Their approach to health literacy uses strategy rather than advocacy to assist practitioners in their work to help improve the health literacy of their clients.
- I wrote to my United States Representative regarding her support of H.R. 4678 which amends the Public Health Service Act to increase health literacy and awareness.

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