

Literacy Across the Health Continuum

Developing Community Collaboratives for Health Literacy

CUNY Institute for Health Equity Conference

March 10-11, 2010

New York City

Presenter: Winston Lawrence, Ed.D.



Literacy Assistance Center

Overview

- * **Role of the LAC**
- * **Adults in literacy programs**
- * **Health literacy in context**
- * **What / why of collaboratives**
- * **Combining perspectives**



The Context - Background

The Literacy Assistance Center (LAC)

- * Established in 1983
- * Provides professional development and technical assistance to adult literacy programs (and to other organizations that educate and train adults including health agencies)



LAC's Core Population

Among those “at risk” for low health literacy:

- * Persons with limited education
- * Those who speak a language other than English at home
- * The elderly
- * Ethnic minorities

Source: NAAL, 2006 (Nat'l Assessment of Adult Literacy)



Adults in Literacy Programs

- * Majority of students are immigrants (60%)
- * Have limited English proficiency or low literacy
- * Live in medically underserved communities
- * Fall into areas of greatest health disparities:
 - Difficulty navigating the health care system
 - Managing many chronic illnesses
 - Limited access to prevention and screening



Why address health literacy needs in literacy classrooms?

- **Adult education environment – one of trust**
- **Health – one of the most critical areas in adult's life**
 - * **Affects retention and persistence**
 - * **Affects employment**
 - * **Affects children's schooling**



Adults in Literacy Programs – Health Literacy Intervention

- * Health Literacy Study Circles (HSPH/NCSALL)
- * Training of teachers in skills-based approach
- * Contextualized instruction



Partnerships – Complement to Literacy Instruction

- * Provide students with real life application of knowledge**
- * Bring health professionals into the community**



Literacy Student/ Patient Connection

- **Institute Of Medicine (2004) sounded health literacy alarm based on NALS (1992) report**
- **90 Million adults have health literacy challenges**
- **These adults consistently could not perform basic reading tasks**
- **Generally these are the same adults in literacy programs**



Linking with Expanded Definition

What is health literacy?

“Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and act upon health-related information. It also refers to the capacity of professionals and institutions to communicate effectively so that community members can make informed decisions and take appropriate actions to protect and promote their health.”

Office of the Mayor, NYC



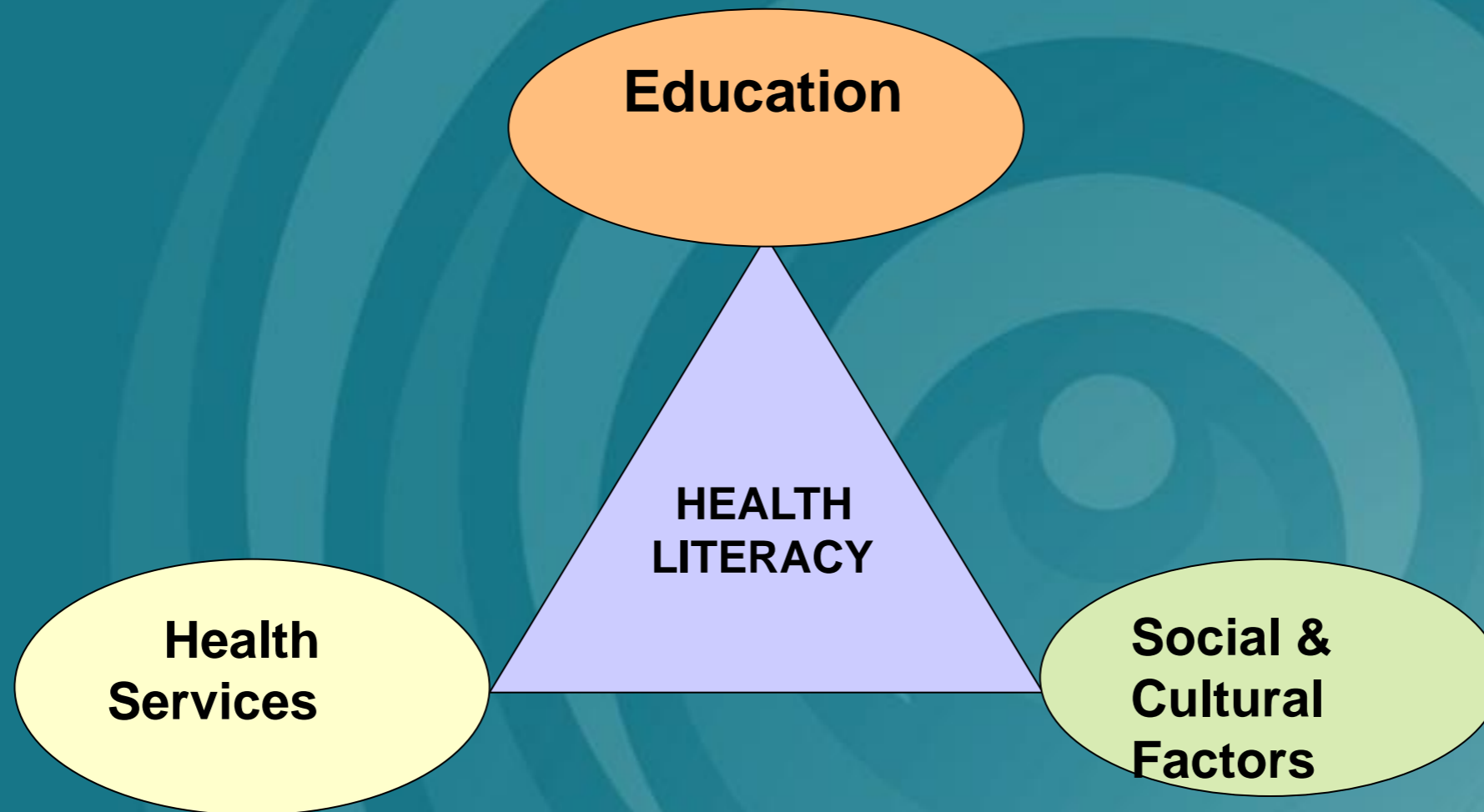
A Systems Definition

Health literacy is an interaction between demands of health systems and individuals' skills.

**Source: Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion,
IOM, 2004**



An Interconnection



ESTABLISHMENT OF COLLABORATIVES



What Are Collaboratives?

- * **Informal umbrella group of health and literacy partnerships**
- * **Voluntary structures**
- * **Participating agencies and individuals have an interest in health literacy**
- * **Focus on the health literacy needs of defined geographic areas**



Partnerships – Core of the Collaboratives

Partnerships operate at varying levels

1. Mutual benefit

- * Health agency provides various services - tours, health screenings, workshops, orientations
- * Literacy programs provide a service - focus group; presentation to doctors or other clinicians

2. Technical assistance

- * Health agency provides a service, e.g. presentation



National Support for Partnerships

- * Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) – Healthy People 2010 (2000)
- Institute Of Medicine (IOM) - Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion (2004)
- * Joint Commission - What Does the Doctor Say? (2007)



What can collaboratives do?

By uniting in a collaborative effort, partners can call attention to the challenge of low health literacy, addressing it in a coordinated and cost-effective fashion.



SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION REQUIRES
RECOGNITION OF THE DIFFERENT MISSIONS
OF HEALTH AND LITERACY AGENCIES



Health Sector's Mission

- * Reach various populations with health promotion and prevention messages**
- * Respond to medical and public health needs of individuals and communities**
- * Build relations with community groups**



Literacy Field's Mission

- * Facilitate students' academic progress
- * Provide enriching instructional context
- * Provide transitions to post sec and work
- * Address adult students' multiple needs through supportive services
- * Provide language and linguistic tools to navigate outside the classroom



Key Challenge

Reconciling the different motivations

- * **Health agencies - focus on medical and public health outcomes**
- * **Literacy programs - focus on instruction**



Common Population, Growing Cooperation

- * Both share a common population
- * Despite different operational orientations, health and literacy partnerships have grown (Rudd, 2002; 2007)
- * Cooperation fits into ecological approach to health promotion (Mc Leroy et al, 1988)



Results of Working Together

- **Building community capacity**
 - * **Health and literacy professionals having linkages**
 - * **More efficient use of health and literacy resources**
 - * **Students/community members becoming more knowledgeable**
- **Building social capital of students/patients/consumers trust, new networks (Bolatti, 2009)**



MEMBER QUOTES

“ ...allows healthcare professionals and community-based organizations the opportunity to share health, public health and literacy information ... ”

“ The connection created between the organizations during the partnership, the endorsement of a teacher’s lesson, and the life altering experience of a student/ patient is what makes the work of the collaborative realistic.”



A Permanent Challenge: Partnering for Life

Health - a major life activity for adults

Major tasks:

- * Navigating health systems**
- * Preventing disease**
- * Managing chronic conditions**



A Permanent Challenge: Partnering For Life

- * People living longer with one or more chronic conditions
- * Healthcare system becoming more complex
- * Greater emphasis on self-care
- * Increasing immigrant population
- * Inadequate/limited education
- * Lack of insurance and access
- Persistent presence of the poor and the unemployed



EXAMPLES

**BRONX HEALTH LITERACY
COLLABORATIVE**

**BROOKLYN HEALTH LITERACY
COLLABORATIVE**



Quote

“Liberty and health are similar –
we know their true value when we lack them.”

Henri Becquerel, French physicist



Conclusion

Health literacy is a critical issue for vulnerable populations

Partnerships between health and literacy programs can advance the health literacy of students/patients and they are good business for medical facilities

Collaboratives provide a coordinating mechanism for partnerships, for the benefit of students/patients and the community



References

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Contact Information

Winston Lawrence, Ed.D.
Literacy Assistance Center
32 Broadway, 10th Floor
New York, NY 10004
212-803-3326
winstonl@lacnyc.org
www.lacnyc.org

