Health Literacy

Health literacy refers to the ability to **UNDERSTAND** and **ACT ON** health information. While individuals with limited basic literacy skills are most at risk of not understanding health information, even highly educated people may struggle with health literacy.

You can’t tell by looking who may have problems with health literacy. While “red flags” are identified below, the best way to determine whether an individual would benefit from a Comprehensive Medication Review is by using the “Teach-Back” or “Show Me” technique with every patient. The pharmacist asks the patient to explain (or show) how they plan to take their medication when they go home. The pharmacist may then clarify any misunderstandings and repeat the process. **Following the use of the Teach-Back Method, patients qualify for a Comprehensive Medication Review if they demonstrate one or more of the following barriers:**

**Patient Expresses a Barrier to UNDERSTANDING Health Information:**
Based on the pharmacist’s professional judgment, the patient does not understand crucial information related to their medication regimen following the use of Teach-Back.

*The following are events that may indicate the patient has barriers to UNDERSTANDING health information:*  
- Patient cannot say what each of their medications is generally used for  
- Patient is familiar with personal medication(s) by color only/does not know the name of medication(s) he or she is taking  
- Patient cannot describe or demonstrate how each medication is taken (using the label as a prompt), including correct dosage and time of day  
- Patient expresses a “red flag” for low literacy, such as:  
  - Incomplete forms  
  - Frequently missed appointments  
  - Delay tactics: “I forgot my glasses”, “I’ll read this later”, “I don’t have time to wait today”, “Let me bring this home so I can discuss it with my spouse”  
  - Reads a document upside down  
- Patient requires the use of a qualified interpreter or translator

**Patient Expresses a Barrier to ACTING ON Health Information:**
Based on the pharmacist’s professional judgment, the patient does not know how to take his or her medication(s) correctly after Teach-Back has been implemented.

*The following are events that may indicate the patient has barriers to ACTING ON health information:*  
- Patient is unable to demonstrate how and when to take prescribed medication(s)  
- Patient is unable to demonstrate pill counts  
- Patient has persistent adherence problems  
- Patient has not finished a complete round of prescribed medications at any time  
- Patient is currently outside of healthy range for indicators of the disease/condition for which patient is taking prescription medication  
- Patient has kept out of date or unused medications for possible future use  
- Patient takes medication(s) obtained from another country