

# Clear language - Powerful Catalyst for the Patient Voice

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# Definitions

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Clear/plain language

- a way of communicating with people so that your message is easy to understand the first time

Catalyst (n) – a method, means , channel

“necessary for health as the patient needs to understand what you say and what they need to do

# Literacy

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## 3 R's

- reading
  - writing
  - arithmetic
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- A key determinant of health

# Health Literacy defined

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Is the ability to find, understand, and use health information, services and supports that help people make informed choices about how to be healthy

In clear language we say:

*“To be able to use talking, reading, writing and numbers to be able to look after your health” OR*

*“To talk, read, write and use numbers to look after your health”*

# The patient experience

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- Hospitals and clinics can be strange places
- Health care workers use big words and talk fast
- When STRESSED reading and understanding can drop several grade levels



# Judy is sick

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- Fever
- Chills,
- Severe head pain ++
- Ear ache
- Coughing ++
- Difficulty speaking



# “LOST MY VOICE”

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## Confusion

- Thought the probiotic was in combination with the antibiotic?
- Antihistamine – I had never used them ..so what kind ?

####...Found out my Blue Cross card was inactivated!!

How do you think Judy might be feeling at this point?

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# What Would Help?

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- Use clear language for all communication i.e. You have infection in your ear, throat and nose
- Write step by step instructions in clear language
- Ask patient to repeat back the instructions to check patient's understanding

## Medical jargon

## Clear language

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- Probiotics
- Antihistamines
- Sinusitis,
- Tracheaitis

# Writing Tips

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Always ask yourself:

Who am I writing this for?

What do they need to know?

Did I write the way I talk?

Is it easier to read?

Is it easy to understand?

# Editing tips

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- expressions and phrases can be confusing
- use a short word instead of a long word
- always cut out a word if it is possible

## Before

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.

## After

- **Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.**

## Grade 11 level

Fortunately, gastroenteritis usually has a limited life span. As long as fluid balance is maintained through adequate replacement, even complete lack of solid nourishment for a day or two won't harm your unborn baby ([Mayer & Rushton, 2002](#)).

## Grade 4 level

The stomach flu can last up to 3 days. Try to drink eight glasses of water or juice a day and your baby should be okay. This is true even if you can't keep food down ([Mayer & Rushton, 2002](#)).

# Speaking Tips

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Use the active voice

Antibiotic instructions read:

“Take 1 tablet twice daily until finished with food “

Clear language :

*Take 1 pill two times a day with meals until the pills are gone*

Use every day words – avoid foreign phrases, scientific or jargon words

## Now you try...

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1. A great enhancement of the learning potential of students can be realized by goal-oriented education professionals.

Good teachers can improve students' learning

2. Adequate hydration is an important component of an exercise regimen.

You should drink water when you exercise.

## Clear language – a Powerful Catalyst for the Patient Voice

Clear language – a tool to help a patient understand

**What the PATIENT NEEDS to know to learn**

not... *What we want them to know/learn*

# References

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