

THE SPOTLIGHT

Spotlighting healthcare-related educational topics
that matter to you

October 2025



The Patient Education and Empowerment Department creates resources that address a range of topics from medical debt to insurance access and disability benefits. The resources we produce are reflective of real-world experiences that meet the needs of the patients PAF serves.

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Health Literacy Month: Understanding Your Health Information Matters



Every October, we observe Health Literacy Month, a crucial time to acknowledge the importance of understanding health information and making informed decisions about your care. Health literacy isn't just about reading medical pamphlets; it's about having the skills to navigate our complex healthcare system, communicate effectively with providers, and take charge of your wellbeing.

What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy means being able to find, understand, and use health information to make good decisions. This includes reading prescription labels, understanding discharge instructions after a hospital visit, navigating insurance benefits, and knowing when to seek medical care. Unfortunately, studies show that nearly 9 out of 10 adults struggle to understand and use health information effectively, which can lead to medication errors, unnecessary hospitalizations, and poorer health outcomes (CDC, 2024).

Why It Matters

When people don't understand their health information, the consequences are serious. They may take medications

incorrectly, miss important follow-up appointments, or delay seeking care when needed. Limited health literacy also contributes to health disparities, disproportionately affecting older adults, people with lower education levels, and non-native English speakers.

Improving Your Health Literacy

The good news is that you can take steps to improve their health literacy. Start by asking questions during medical appointments; there's no such thing as a silly question when it comes to your health. Ask your provider to explain terms you don't understand, and don't leave until you're clear about your diagnosis, treatment plan, and next steps.

Take notes during appointments or bring a trusted friend or family member for support. Request written instructions and clarify medication directions, including what the medicine is for, how to take it, and potential side effects. Take advantage of patient portals where you can review visit summaries and test results.

Moving Forward

This Health Literacy Month, let's commit to bridging the communication gap in healthcare. Whether you're a patient,

caregiver, or healthcare professional, you can contribute to a system where everyone has the power to understand and manage their health effectively. Remember: understanding your health is your right, and asking for clarity is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Check out PAF's publications aimed at helping you improve your health literacy:

[Fostering Clear Communication With Your Healthcare Provider](#)

[How to Make the Most of Your Provider Appointment](#)

[Fact or Fiction? Finding Credible Health Information Online](#)

[A Patient's Guide: Living With a New Diagnosis](#)

[A Patient's Guide to Asking the Right Questions and Finding Support](#)

[Healthcare Conversations: Communicating What's Important to You](#)

[Finding a Health Care Team That Works For You](#)