



Health literacy in the digital era

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24 January 2017, Tallinn

Background

- Development in technology
- Prioritizing prevention
- Shift from doctor-centered paternalistic relationships to patient-centered healthcare

- New expectations & responsibilities for patients:
 - More control (health management, decision making)
 - Active consumers of health information
 - Most people need help to understand health information

- **HEALTH LITERACY – their toolbox**

Defining health literacy (HL)

- The personal, cognitive and social skills which determine the ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information to promote and maintain good health¹

Characteristics of HL

- Changes over life span
- Variety of settings (home, work, school, streets)
- Essential to empowerment (asthma example)
- Every 2nd individual affected

Low health literacy

More likely

- poor ability to interpret labels and health messages
- to have work-related accidents
- medication errors
- hospitalizations
- use of emergency care
- poor overall health status, higher mortality rates

Less likely

- to have preventive behaviors (mam, cc screening, flu vaccine)
- to successfully manage chronic disease²

Social determinants

- People with limited health literacy most often have:³
 - lower levels of education
 - lower income
 - are older adults
 - are migrants or their children
 - depend on social support
 - disability or chronic disease
- Limited health literacy further reinforces existing inequalities
- **Avoid stereotypes!**

What can we do?

- **HL Universal Precautions Approach⁴**
 - assume that most patients will have difficulty understanding health information
 - high literacy ≠ high health literacy
 - HL level can depend on situation
 - Use plain language agenda

Overall recommendations

- Use plain language (6th grade)
- Use terms that are used in common language. Avoid tech/medical jargon
- Avoid terms with multiple meanings
- Explain difficult terms in simple words
- Use terms consistently, explain abbreviations and acronyms
- Use active voice
- Use positive wording

Overall recommendations

- Use singular (You) instead of group level (All people)
- Provide information in target group's native language
- Take into account target group's age, culture, religion, race, nationality
- Use universal symbols (environment)
- Consider alternative communication means
- Always involve target group when developing materials

Oral communication

- Assess baseline understanding before providing extensive information – allows customization / tailoring
- Speak slowly, respectfully, don't patronize
- Emphasize 1 to 3 key points, repeat these points
- Encourage them to ask questions
- Use an open-ended questions
- Use models, illustrations when explaining difficult things
- Use a *teach-back* technique
- Use a *show-back* approach
- Always provide the core information also in a written form (more time at home, family members, clear understanding what is expected)

Written communication

Design

- Divide text into chunks, use subheadings, bullet points
- Organize your writing to meet patients' needs (font 12, sans serif, white space, line length, justified left, max two fonts, avoid all caps)
- Dark text, light background, avoid glossy paper, be modest with colors
- Use photos and simple illustrations instead of long texts

Numbers

- Present specific numbers not just description ("low risk")
- Talk about absolute risk (decline from 4% to 2%, not relative risk (declined by 50%))
- When talking about risk, use full numbers (1 out of 100, not 1%), use it throughout
- Use scales, bar graphs, line charts, flow diagrams, pictographs, tables
- Mention both positive and negative

E-health literacy

Background: Benefits

- 48% of Europeans searched for online health information¹⁰
- Wide range of information
- Multimodality - text, audio, video
- Various technologies: computer, tablet, smartphone
- Tools for personalized health information (risk calculation, self-monitoring, feedback)
- Web-based counseling
- Anonymity – sensitive issues
- No geographical or time barriers
- 2-way communication (Web 2.0)
- Low cost

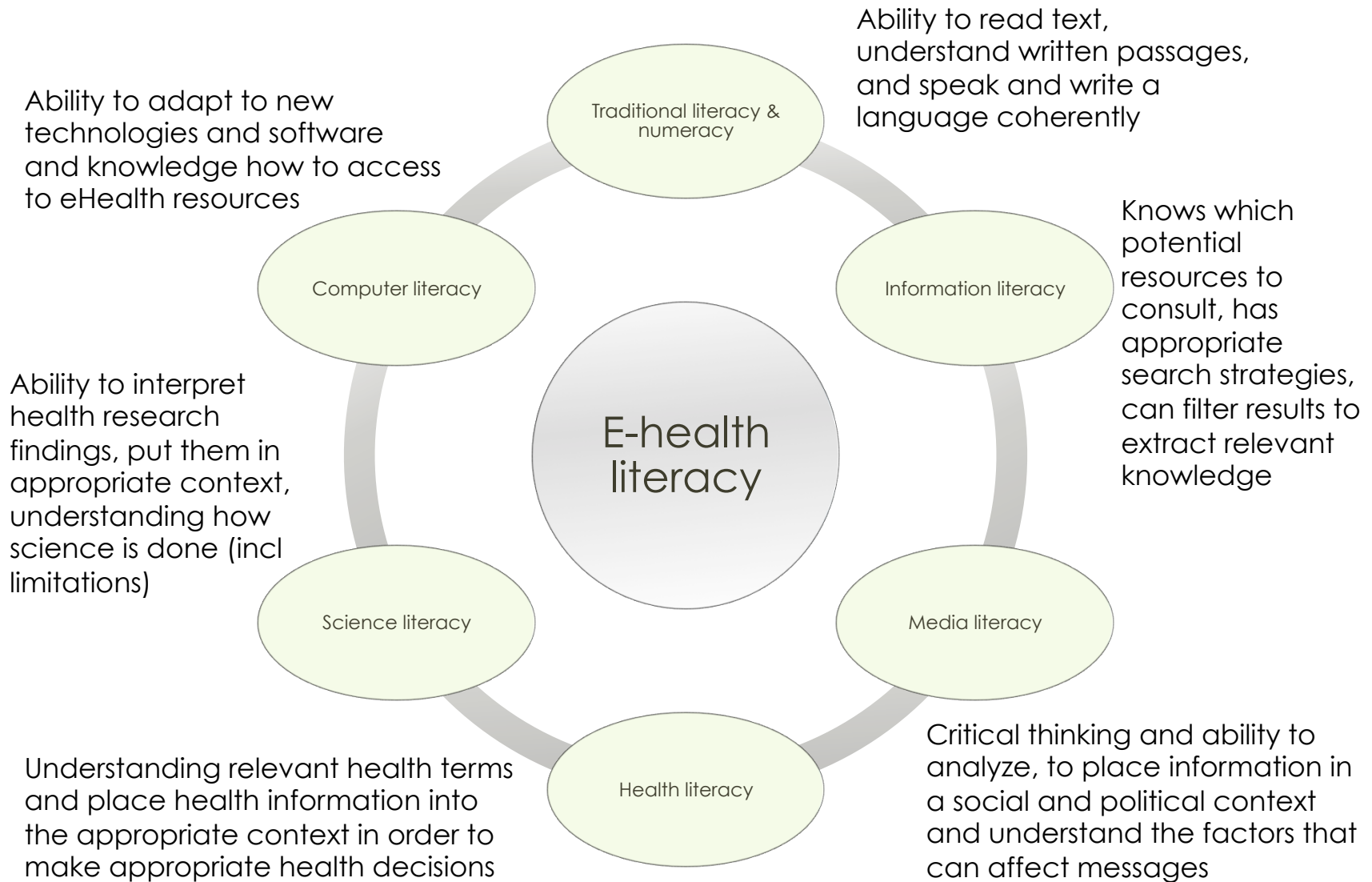
Background: Threats

- Everyone can be an author!
 - inaccurate, uncontrolled, one-sided, or false information
- Requires knowledge on
 - how to find, choose, evaluate and use information
- Digital divide
- Ordinary health literacy is not sufficient anymore!

E-health literacy

- The individual's ability to seek, find, understand, and appraise health information from electronic sources and apply the knowledge gained to addressing or solving a health problem.¹¹

The Lily model¹¹



Evaluating online HI

WHO?	Who runs the website?
	Can you contact them?
	Who is funding the website?
	Does the site have ads, are they labeled?
WHY?	Why are they providing the site?
	Does the site ask for your personal information? Do they tell you how it will be used?

Evaluating online HI

WHERE?	Where does the information on the site come from? Are the authors experts? If not, is it reviewed by experts?
	Is the information someone's opinion or based on facts?
	Does it have proper citations to scientific research?
	If it uses texts from other sources, have they been cited?

Evaluating online HI

WHAT?	Does the site make unbelievable claims?
HOW?	Is the site using simple language or technical and medical jargon?
	Is the site using a sensational writing style?
WHEN?	How current is this information?
	Was it updated within one year?
	Are the links working?

- Get a second opinion! Check more than one site.
- Be careful with social media. Make sure the account is authentic.

Credits

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- ⁴ Davis, T. (2015). [Health literacy: Hidden barriers and practical strategies](#). U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

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- ¹⁰ Eurostat. (2016). [Individuals - internet activities](#) [isoc_ci_ac_].
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- National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health. (2014). [Finding and evaluating online resources](#).
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