

How to consider the health literacy of patients?

Liis Hinsberg

Health Promotion and Communication Division



Estonian
Health Insurance
Fund

1,2 million people in Estonia have health insurance through EHIF

- As the single provider of health insurance in Estonia, we are directly working with 1,2 million people in Estonia
- The main contribution of EHIF comes from procuring health services for people
- However, influencing health knowledge and behaviors is equally as important
- How does health literacy help us in doing this?

- Today we'll talk about:
 - Why patient education is essential
 - Health insurance literacy
 - Using plain language (and why it's difficult sometimes)
 - The importance of testing materials

We focus on educating people about Healthcare and healthy lifestyles

- One of our priorities is child health
 - Getting children to visit the dentist (free for kids under 19)
 - Prevention: teaching kids and parents healthy lifestyles (diabetes prevention, safe environments, new parents learning the support from healthcare, collaboration with schools)
- How to navigate the healthcare system?
 - Learning about benefits we offer
 - How to save on prescription drugs?
 - What kind of doctor can help you when?
- Health literacy in a sense is our way of getting people to **act** upon all the health information out there
 - Attend a cancer screening if you're invited
 - Know how to take care of your health outside the doctor's office

Patient education and health literacy

- People need to understand the healthcare system to become informed users of the system
 - Explaining insurance in an understandable way
 - Explaining the role of different doctors (do you really need to see a specialized care doctor every time?)
 - Patients' rights
- But they also need to know how to be and **stay** healthy
 - Behavior change (drink water instead of soda)
 - See your dentist annually
 - Attend a screening every two years (even if you don't have any symptoms)
- At this era of information most people understand basic concepts such as cancer is severe and smoking is bad, but how to enable them to understand how these abstract notions affect their lives?
- In addition to explaining this in an understandable way, you also have to make sure people understand the benefits, barriers, susceptibility and severity. We have to give them a cue to action.

Using plain language is the foundation

- Often talking about topics like health insurance or medicine can become too specific and jargon-y
- Us, health communicators, have to be a bridge between lay audiences and the medical community
- Not only with target audiences or directly with patients, but also with the media
- Plain language is not „dumbing it down“, however, sometimes you need to work hard to convince people that it is the right thing to do
 - Do you need to know exactly how your car works when you go to get an oil change?

How we developed a dictionary to talk about colorectal cancer

- Since July 2016 EHIF offers a nation-wide screening program for colorectal cancer
- We are starting wider scale communication efforts to promote the program this year
- To make sure people understand this topic:
 - We created a dictionary of commonly used medical terms in lay language that was added to primary care physicians' manual for the screening
 - Removed hard to understand statistics and replaced them with easier numbers (3 out of 10, 900 people a year, etc).
 - Created print materials for patients to read at home, including a step-by-step manual (with images) on how to take the test at home
- People need to understand: (A) why it's important to participate and (B) how to do it

The importance of pre-testing AND evaluating materials

- How do we know if the constructs and wording we are using are still too complicated?
- Focus groups and surveys
- Before AND after a campaign
- In both Russian and Estonian, you can't just translate materials and hope the other audiences understand the meaning just the same
 - Example: we recently discovered that our screening materials are too technical to the Russian speaking population -> need to hire a consultant to go over the texts
- After the campaign: measuring the efforts for quantitatively and qualitatively

In conclusion, from our experience to make sure people understand your efforts, go to the people

- Use language people actually use in everyday talk
- Scrap confusing statistics, and replace them with simple to understand numeric values
 - If you really want to succeed, use visuals with words (infographics, simple charts, 1-2-3 instructions)
- Pre-test every material with the actual target audience
 - And dont be disappointed when the audience hates it or doesn't understand at all, that's why we conduct these things
- Use same principles throughout channels (our website is for diferent audiences, need to speak in their language)
- And de-clutter your materials (we can't expect people to read through pages of information)
- Avoid jargon at any cost



Thank you!

Liis.Hinsberg@haigekassa.ee