

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Northern NSW Health Literacy Project

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Introduction: 60% of Australian adults do not have the level of health literacy needed to understand and act on day to day health information. Low health literacy is linked to poorer health status, low use of preventive health services and higher rates of preventable hospitalisation. Faced with a growing and aging population and increasing rates of chronic and complex conditions, Northern NSW health services and health professionals must provide clear, accessible information that empowers patients, families and carers to understand and manage health conditions.

Practice change implemented: The Northern NSW Health Literacy Project empowers people to understand and manage health conditions by:

Developing health information that is easy to access, understand and act upon.

Partnering with consumers to develop health information, assess service design and deliver health education.

Building the capacity of the health workforce to improve communication with people in their care.

Aim and theory of change: The Project aims to improve health communication and engage the community to empower people to be partners in their health care and understand and manage health conditions. Improving health literacy in this way can improve health outcomes and health service quality, safety and efficiency.

Targeted population and stakeholders: The target population are people with chronic and complex conditions, their families and carers. Key stakeholders are the Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSW LHD) and North Coast Primary Health Network (NCPHN).

Timeline: The Project commenced in July 2016.

Highlights: The Project is jointly funded and implemented by NNSW LHD and NCPHN, allowing a unique whole of health system approach.

The Health Literacy Website is the first of its kind in Australia. It contains information, resources and an online library of patient resources developed to meet health literacy standards. Visit <http://healthliteracy.nnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/>.

Health Literacy Awareness and Workshops have been designed and delivered to over 700 health professionals and community members with significant impact on health literacy knowledge and skills. 100% of surveyed attendees intended to implement at least one health literacy strategy.

Health professionals are now developing and reviewing resources and communication practices in partnership with consumers to ensure health information is easy to access, understand and act on. Community members engaged in these processes report greater health literacy as a result of their involvement.

Sustainability: The Project has resulted in systemic changes, building the foundations for a culture of health literacy. Health literacy is embedded in policy, and there is an increase in health literacy knowledge, confidence and skills among patients and workforce.

The Website ensures sustainability, already continually expanding and improving.

Transferability: The Website is easily transferable and accessible across health settings and geographical boundaries.

Utilising digital technologies allows transferability within and outside NNSW.

Conclusions: Improving the health literacy of health services and health professionals and empowering people to understand and manage their health can improve health outcomes and health service quality, safety and efficiency. The NNSW Health Literacy Project has demonstrated significant progress towards these aims and continues to build on these achievements.

Keywords: health literacy; community engagement; empowering people; consumers
