

Health Literacy Promotion in Clinical Practice Guidelines

Barbara Fahmy, MS OTR/L MPA

Project Summary (AND the Problem)

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), administers the National Guidelines Clearinghouse (NGC). The NGC electronic database houses approximately 1340 state, national, and international evidence-based and consensus-based clinical practice guidelines. Healthcare professionals, governmental organizations, insurance carriers, and regulatory agencies use clinical practice guidelines to make health care decisions for patients and for populations. A search of guidelines summaries revealed that a mere 10 addressed the concept of health literacy.

In Conclusion:

Health literacy as a tool to improve health outcomes is under-represented in clinical practice guidelines that are published on the NGC.

Methods

21 summaries that fit the broad search-term criteria of literacy were pulled from the database. 1 document was immediately discarded because it was not a guideline summary. The remaining 20 summaries were classified and scored into 4 categories:

Category 0: The term "literacy" was not related to "health literacy." The broader term was used in an effort to ensure that applicable summaries were not inadvertently missed.

Category 1: Guideline had a mention of the term, acknowledging some value of health literacy as an important part of patient care.

Category 2: Guideline included a brief definition of health literacy.

Category 3: Guideline included examples of strategies designed to improve health literacy, such as teach-back, visual aids, plain language.

Category 4: Guideline included an evidence or consensus statement supporting health literacy.

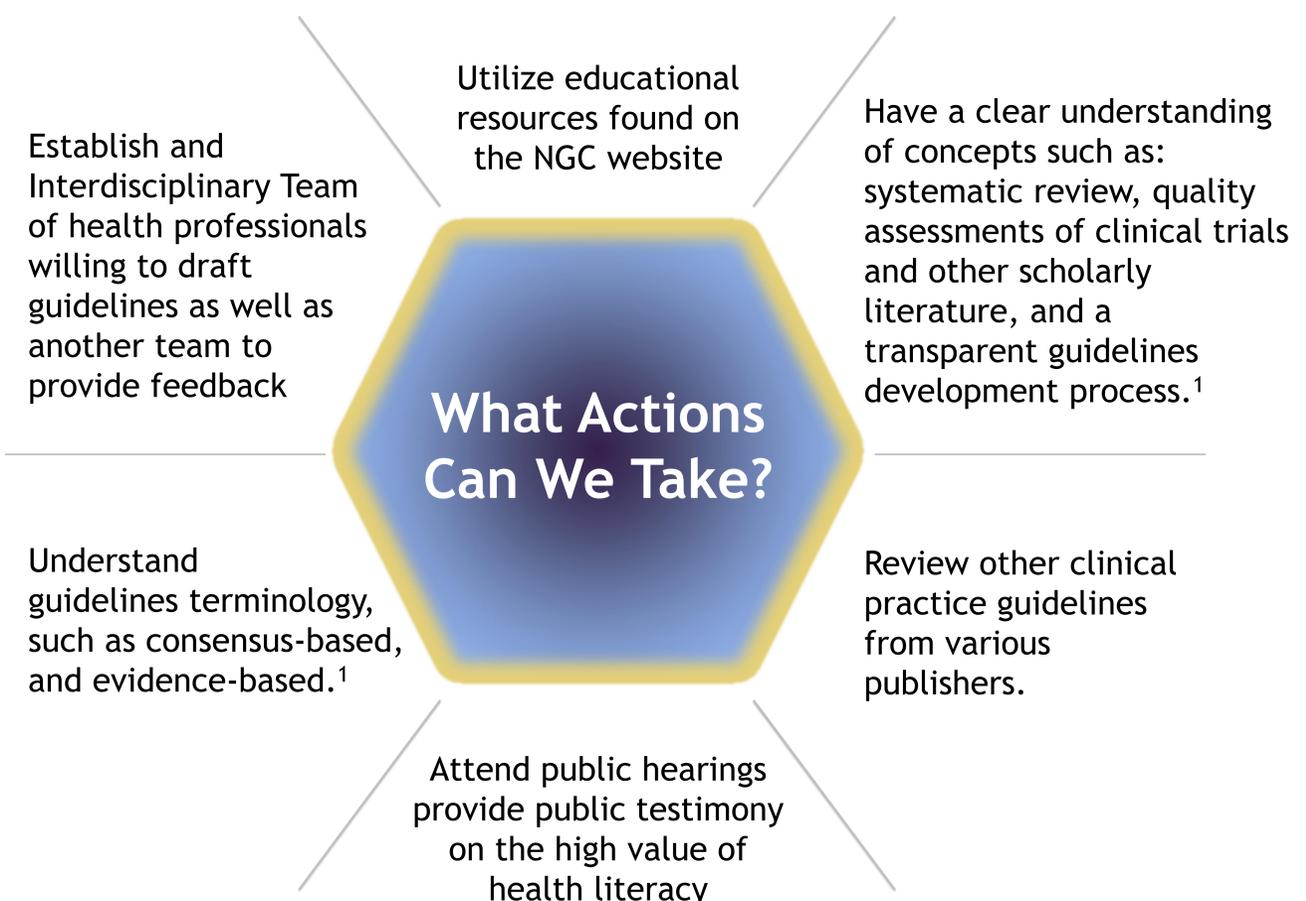
Results

- 6 guidelines were classified as Category 1
- 1 guideline met categories 1 and 2.
- 1 guideline met categories 1, 2, and 3.
- 1 guideline met categories 1 and 3.
- Only 1 guideline met all 4 categories.

Discussion (AND Solutions)

It is recommended that organizations which support and value health literacy as an integral part of patient care seize opportunities to have this principle defined, described, and promoted in future clinical practice guidelines. Due to the nature of a particular guideline, health literacy may not be appropriate for inclusion in all instances. However, there should be more than 10 in a compendium of over 1300 guidelines.

These results present an opportunity for the public, health care professionals and governmental and non-governmental organizations to collaborate on the creation of original clinical practice guidelines; or alternatively, to collaborate with other established guideline developers to support the many benefits using health literacy to improve health outcomes.



1. IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2011. *Clinical Practice Guidelines We Can Trust*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.