

# LIVEWELL NURSING

## Public Health Literacy: A Vital Component of Health Promotion

By: Angela Mitchell, CNO



Public health literacy is an essential aspect of health promotion and disease prevention, particularly in nursing practice. It encompasses the ability of individuals to access, understand, evaluate, and use health information effectively to make informed health decisions. As healthcare professionals, nurses play a pivotal role in enhancing public health literacy, which can lead to improved health outcomes within communities. Public health literacy goes beyond basic reading and writing skills; it involves critical thinking and the ability to apply health information in real-world contexts (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021). This concept is increasingly relevant as health systems become more complex, with patients facing a plethora of information sources, including social media, health websites, and traditional media (Estrela et al., 2023).

Effective public health communication strategies are essential for improving health literacy. These strategies should be tailored to meet the needs of diverse populations, considering cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds (Cortés et al., 2020).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

When individuals can effectively navigate health information, they are more likely to engage in preventive health behaviors, adhere to treatment plans, and utilize health services appropriately. Nurses are uniquely positioned to enhance public health literacy through direct patient education, community outreach, and advocacy. By employing clear communication techniques and culturally competent practices, nurses can help patients understand their health conditions and the importance of preventive measures. Strategies for healthcare professionals include:

1. **Patient Education:** Nurses can simplify complex medical information and use teach-back methods to ensure that patients comprehend their health needs (Talevski et al., 2020). This approach not only reinforces learning but also empowers patients to take an active role in their health management.
2. **Community Engagement:** Engaging with communities through workshops, health fairs, and informational sessions allows nurses to address public health issues directly. These interactions can foster a sense of trust and enhance the community's overall health literacy (Minor, 2023).
3. **Advocacy and Policy Involvement:** Nurses can advocate for policies that promote health literacy at the organizational and community levels. By collaborating with public health agencies and educational institutions, nurses can help develop resources that are accessible and relevant to various populations (Catton, 2021).

# (Continued) Public Health Literacy: A Vital Component of Health Promotion

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Despite the importance of public health literacy, several barriers exist. Limited access to healthcare resources, socioeconomic disparities, and misinformation can hinder individuals' ability to understand and utilize health information effectively (Rudd et al., 2023). Furthermore, the rapid spread of misinformation, particularly through social media, poses a significant challenge in maintaining accurate public health messaging.

Enhancing public health literacy is essential for improving health outcomes and promoting equitable access to healthcare. Nurses are critical in this endeavor, utilizing their skills to educate, engage, and advocate for their patients and communities. As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, fostering public health literacy will be crucial in addressing health disparities and ensuring that all individuals can make informed health decisions.



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## SUBMISSIONS

Please e-mail submission (ideas, photos, articles, trainings, dates, accolades, local or national news, etc.) to [Araceli.Casas@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:Araceli.Casas@sdcounty.ca.gov)

For consideration in next issue, please submit entries by close of business on November 15, 2024. Submission limits: 125-275 words

**November Topic: *Gratitude and Kindness***



**Access the County's EBSCO  
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# Health Literacy in Action

By Donna West, MPH, RN, PHN, Quality Assurance Specialist – Office of Nursing Excellence

Ensuring that all San Diego residents have equitable access to health communication they can understand and services they can navigate is the hallmark of a “health literate” organization and key to achieving health equity. As the most prominent health communicators on our COSD team, nurses have a unique opportunity to make it easier for our clients and patients to “navigate, understand, and use information and services to take care of their health” (Brega et al., 2019) while advancing health literate policies and practices throughout our organization.

Consider the last time you shared health information with a patient, client, family member, or caregiver and assumed that they “got it”, only to discover later that they were completely confused - how did this experience help shape your practice? Following are insights from some of our very own subject matter experts Robin Anderson, Diana Becerra, Kaila Domingo, and Clowie Urbanavage along with tips from national health literacy experts:



- **Always start with where your client is at and what they already know!**
- **Communication** needs to be reflective, open, non-judgmental, and culturally responsive.
- **Use plain language** based on client learning and language preferences. *“NFP has amazing learning facilitators with images and simple messages in multiple languages.” (DB)*
- **Avoid generalizations** about communication preferences and skills. *“Despite stereotypes about older adults and technology, many of them use smart phone apps very effectively to track their vital signs, lab results and communication with their healthcare team.” (KD)*
- **Keep learning interactive** with models, games, manipulatives, images, and video links. *“It is an eye-opening experience for many of my pregnant clients as they look at fetal models I bring out to our visits!” (RA)*
- **Empower clients** by connecting with resources they need to navigate the healthcare system such as transportation and interpretation. *“By the time we discharge them we want to make sure that they're self-sufficient.” (CU)*
- Recognize that the **stigma of government assistance programs** like Medi-Cal is very real and especially common in some communities, such as older adults from rural areas. Reframe the shame around public benefits: [Ending Stigma Around Receiving Benefits](#) (NOCA, 2016).
- People get overwhelmed with discharge instructions and need special assistance during care transitions. Nurses can support clients with **self-management skills** and facilitate scheduling of follow-up appointments with all members of their healthcare team.
- **Check understanding** using [Teach Back](#) and “Show Back” to make sure clients/patients can repeat instructions or demonstrate a task (Federico, 2016).
- **Adopt a Universal Precautions approach** to health literacy [AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit Third Edition](#) (AHQR, 2024)

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Claudinne "Clowie" Urbanavage, BSN, RN, PHN - Rural Health Discharge Program-East Public Health Center



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# A Collective Approach to Self-Care & Gratitude

By: Trina Rey, PHN, Aging & Independence Services-IHSS

As nurses, we are familiar with self-care tools and techniques that can be used to help prevent burnout and improve resiliency. We know we should get regular exercise, eat healthy, stay hydrated and try to sleep well, and we are aware of the importance of managing various personal and workplace stressors. “Professionals who are not protected with appropriate tools and resources are especially vulnerable to and more easily compromised by compassion fatigue” (Watson, 2024, p. 67). One method that can be used to combat such fatigue, is practicing gratitude. Halm & Loebach (2024) state that as a self-care option, gratitude can be practiced anywhere. It begins with intention to learn to see the positive, deepening our awareness of what we appreciate. When we practice gratefulness, scientists have demonstrated that reward pathways in the brain related to stress and interpersonal bonding are activated, improving connections and relationships that strengthen support networks. Thus, by engaging in small moments of gratitude throughout the day, we retain these neural networks to shift from a negative to a positive focus and thereby change our emotional responses to everyday situations (p. 150).

While a powerful tool, exercising gratitude is just one of the ways nurses can foster the practice of self-care and put forth efforts to improve our professional quality of life (QOL). That said, being trained in self-care techniques and demonstrating personal resilience are just a few of the ingredients needed to promote growth in this area (Watson, 2024, p.69). A study by Watson (2024) suggests that not only nurse resiliency, but also organizational support, and a healthy work environment are critical components that factor into a nurse’s overall professional QOL. As a result, it is crucial for nursing leaders, educators, and nurses, to advocate for a team approach to the promotion of professional QOL outcomes (p. 69). Halm & Loebach (2024) also claim that promoting healthy self-care practices is as much of an organizational imperative as an individual priority. Nurse leaders can foster a culture of gratitude by infusing it into the routines of their role and teams as well as into the fabric of the larger organization (p.150).



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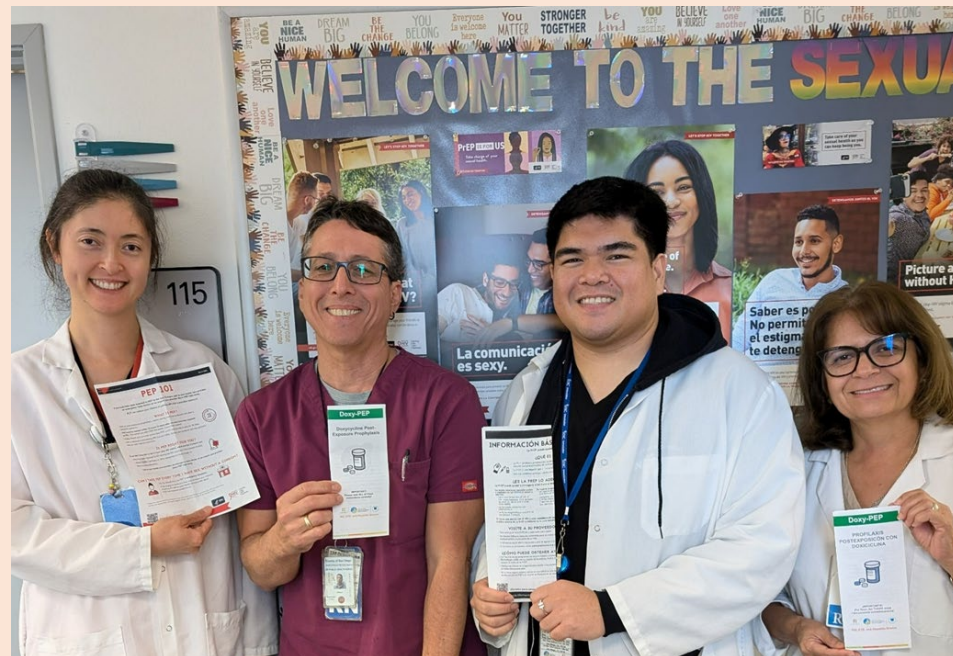
# Health Literacy and Healthy People 2030

Carlos Ayala, Sr. PHN - Sexual Health Clinic

Healthy People 2030 has set a new goal to enhance health literacy at both individual and organizational levels, marking the first time since its inception in 1979. This initiative recognizes the critical link between health literacy and health equity, emphasizing that social determinants of health play a significant role in this relationship. The program identifies health literacy as a public health challenge requiring organizational support, with proposed objectives focusing on improving communication between patients and providers and encouraging active patient involvement in their care. Special attention is also given to enhancing communication for patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) and conducting research aimed at boosting health literacy across the U.S. population.

From a public health standpoint, improving health literacy can foster trust and advance health equity. Trust is essential for encouraging individuals to engage in health-promoting behaviors and seek care. Strategies for building trust include using clear, straightforward language, offering translation services, and employing culturally relevant communication.

At the County level, we actively promote health literacy by fostering a culture of customer service that prioritizes health equity, regardless of individuals' health literacy levels. We provide health information in multiple languages, and our diverse workforce is dedicated to delivering culturally competent care that enhances our multicultural community. By leveraging health literacy, we aim to improve patient outcomes and achieve the goals set forth by Healthy People 2030.



L to R: Maricris Zisselsberger, RN, Carlos Ayala, Sr. PHN, Glen Fabian, PHN, and Sara Covarrubias De Hernandez, RN; *not pictured Lourdes Medina, RN and Tim McWilliams, PHN Supervisor.*

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