



For Immediate Release
May 7, 2003

Contact: Mora Berberich
(212) 453-2325

Steering Committee:

American Federation for Aging Research
American Medical Association Foundation
American Nurses Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Public Health Association
David Baker, MD
California Literacy, Inc.
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Alliance for Hispanic Health
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Coalition for Literacy
National Council of La Raza, Institute for Hispanic Health
The National Council on the Aging
National Health Council
National Medical Association
Janet Ohene-Frempong, MS
Partnership for Prevention
Pfizer Inc
ProLiteracy Worldwide

LITERACY SKILLS ARE STRONGEST PREDICTOR OF HEALTH STATUS IN UNITED STATES

New Coalition Unveils Action Agenda, Tools to Elevate 'Health Literacy' Among At-Risk Populations

WASHINGTON – Literacy skills are a stronger predictor of an individual's health status than age, income, employment status, education level, or racial/ethnic group, according to the Partnership for Clear Health Communication. The group, a new coalition of 19 of the nation's top health and civic organizations, today unveiled an aggressive action agenda that addresses the growing public health problem of low "health literacy," or the ability to read, understand and act on health information.

An increasing body of evidence indicates that low health literacy may be an underlying factor in high use of some health care services as well as influencing health outcomes. This pervasive but, until now, relatively hidden issue is estimated to cost the U.S. health care system up to \$73 billion annually and puts 90 million people -- nearly 1-in-3 -- at risk for poor health outcomes.

The difficulty may be due to poor reading comprehension skills, the complexity of medical information, or the format in which it is delivered. Certain groups are more vulnerable due to age, language skills, cultural factors or reading skills; however, anyone can have difficulty understanding health care information. Studies have shown that even people who are college educated and can understand complicated words prefer to have medical information stated simply.

-more-

A coalition of national organizations that are working together to promote awareness and solutions around the issue of low health literacy and its effect on health outcomes.

"Medical terms often come across to patients as if the doctor is speaking another language," said Dr. David Baker, a member of the Partnership and Chief of General Internal Medicine at the Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University. "Health information needs to be communicated to patients in plain language and in a way that is appropriate to patients' individual background and culture. The Partnership for Clear Health Communication was formed to leverage the collective resources and expertise of its members to improve communication between patients and health care providers."

The Partnership for Clear Health Communication Action Agenda

The Partnership for Clear Health Communication will promote awareness of and solutions to low health literacy and its effect on health outcomes while furthering the cause of increased, meaningful communication between patients and providers by:

- 1. Educating patients and providers**
- 2. Developing and applying practical solutions to improve patient-provider communication**
- 3. Conducting nationally coordinated research to further define the health literacy issue and evaluate solutions.**
- 4. Increasing support for health literacy policy and funding**

The Partnership and its members are committed to offering free and low-cost resources and programs that deliver information, medical education and practice management tools to health care providers and groups that provide information to patients.

"Effective communication tools are particularly critical when people of different cultures, ethnic and racial backgrounds need to exchange information in a way that all parties can understand and respond," said Dr. Sharon Allison-Ottey, a physician and Chair of the Health Literacy Task Force of the National Medical Association, a member of the Partnership. "The first step in this solution is to help patients and providers communicate in a clear manner. One tool that can help this process is *Ask Me 3*."

Ask Me 3 is a tool developed by the Partnership to help improve health communication between patients and providers. Through patient and provider education materials developed by leading health literacy experts (available online at www.AskMe3.org), *Ask Me 3* promotes three simple but essential questions patients can ask their providers in every health care interaction:

- 1. What is my main problem?**
- 2. What do I need to do?**
- 3. Why is it important for me to do this?**

“There are many solutions to the low health literacy problem that cost little or nothing, are easy to implement, and don’t take much time,” said Janet Ohene-Frempong, MS, health literacy expert and a member of the Partnership. “Most can help to effectively organize and focus patient-provider interactions in a way that can ultimately save time for the provider, improve health outcomes, and even save lives.”

Better understanding of low health literacy is an essential step in improving patient/provider communication. Therefore, additional educational and resource materials such as examples of simple interventions, literacy resources, and a bibliography of research studies are also available at www.AskMe3.org.

About the Partnership for Clear Health Communication

The **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** is a coalition of national organizations that are working together to promote awareness and solutions around the issue of low health literacy and its effect on health outcomes. The Partnership serves consumers, public health officials, health care professionals, health educators, literacy specialists, patient advocates and caregivers, health associations and policy makers.

The Partnership and its members are committed to offering resources and programs that deliver information, medical education and practice management tools to providers of care and information to patients.

Partnership for Clear Health Communication Steering Committee members include:

American Federation for Aging Research	National Coalition for Literacy
American Medical Association Foundation	National Council of La Raza, Institute for Hispanic Health
American Nurses Association	The National Council on the Aging
American Pharmacists Association	National Health Council
American Public Health Association	National Medical Association
David Baker, MD	Janet Ohene-Frempong, MS
California Literacy, Inc.	Partnership for Prevention
National Alliance for Caregiving	Pfizer Inc
National Alliance for Hispanic Health	ProLiteracy Worldwide
National Association of Community Health Centers	

For more information on the Partnership for Clear Health Communication or Ask Me 3, please visit our Web site: www.AskMe3.org.

###