

# **Addressing Health Literacy through Staff Development in a Primary Care Setting: A Quality Improvement Project**

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## **Abstract**

**BACKGROUND:** Health literacy influences how patients interpret provider recommendations, agree to treatment modalities, and access health care services.

**LOCAL PROBLEM:** A Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in rural Washington State reports patient experiences involving social determinants of health including health literacy, which can contribute to increased morbidity and mortality, to chronic health complications and to misunderstandings when navigating the health system.

**PURPOSE:** Increase primary care and clinic staffs' knowledge about health literacy and promote implementation of health literacy techniques in the primary care setting.

**METHODS:** The Health Literate Care Model and framework focusing on attributes of health literate organizations were used to incorporate interventions aimed at systemic and patient-centered practices.

**INTERVENTIONS:** A staff development approach in a primary care setting directed at medical assistant and reception staff was used. Interventions included educating staff about health literacy and introducing techniques to improve patients' understanding of visit interactions.

**RESULTS:** All participants reported an increase in baseline knowledge after health literacy training even if previously educated about the topic. Health literacy techniques including the teach-back method were increasingly used throughout the project. Gaps in health literacy

understanding remain with participants, especially when identifying the health literacy needs in patients.

**CONCLUSION:** Focusing on continued staff development in health literacy can further improve this gap, promote health literacy interventions in subsequent patient encounters, and improve outcomes for patients long-term.