



CMAG-1

3

Health Literacy



CHAPTER 3: HEALTH LITERACY

In this Chapter we will review the following:

- ✓ Define Health Literacy
- ✓ Define Realm-R and it's meaning.

CHAPTER 3: HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy is defined as the ability to read, understand, and act on health information.

Poor health literacy results in medication errors, impaired ability to remember and follow treatment recommendations, and reduced ability to navigate within the healthcare system. Additionally, poor health literacy puts patients at an increased risk for hospitalization compared with patients who have adequate health literacy (Bass, 2003).

Assessment of Health Literacy - the REALM-R (Bass, 2003)

The Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine Revised (REALM-R) is a brief screening instrument used to assess an adult patient's ability to read common medical words. It is designed to assist medical professionals in identifying patients at risk for poor literacy skills. The REALM-R is a word recognition test consisting of 8 items. Words that appear in this tool are:

Fat	Anemia
Flu	Fatigue
Pill	Directed
Osteoporosis	Colitis
Allergic	Constipation
Jaundice	

Fat, *Flu*, and *Pill* are not scored and are positioned at the beginning of the REALM-R to decrease test anxiety and enhance patient confidence. The following steps describe the approach that can be utilized to execute the test:

1. The case manager should give the patient the list of REALM-R words.
2. In the case manager's own words, introduce the REALM-R to the patient. **Note that the words "read" and "test" should be avoided when introducing and administering the REALM-R to the patient.** These words may make the patient feel uncomfortable and unwilling to participate. The following can be utilized to introduce the REALM-R:

"Sometimes in healthcare we may use medical words that patients aren't familiar with. We would like you to take a look at this list of words to help us get an idea of what medical words you are familiar with. It will help us know what kinds of patient education to give you. Starting with the first word [point to 1st

ADHERENCE-FACT:

At any given time, regardless of age group, up to 59 percent of those on five or more medications are taking them improperly.

Low Health Literacy costs the Healthcare system as much as \$58 Billion a year.

NOTES:

word with pencil], *please say all of the words you know. If you come to a word you don't know, you can sound it out or just skip it and go on.*"

ADHERENCE FACT:

“Literacy skills are the strongest predictor of an individual's health status.”

3. If a patient takes more than 5 seconds on a word, they should be encouraged to move on to the next word (eg, say "Let's try the next word"). If the patient begins to miss every word or appears to be struggling or frustrated, tell the patient, *"Just look down the list and say the words you know."*
4. Scoring: The REALM-R Examiner Record (Appendix 2) is used to record the outcome of the test. Count as an error any word that is not attempted or is mispronounced. Place a check mark ("✓") next to each word the patient pronounces correctly and an "X" next to each word the patient does not attempt or mispronounces. Those patients scoring 6 or less correctly ("✓") should be considered to be at risk for health literacy issues.
5. Telephonically administered REALM-R: If it becomes necessary to administer the REALM-R remotely by telephone, the following procedure should be employed.
 - a. Ask the patient to obtain a piece of paper and pencil.
 - b. Explain the purpose of the REALM-R to the patient as described in step 2.
 - c. *Slowly* spell each word and ask the patient to write it down on the piece of paper.
 - d. Ask the patient to pronounce the word.
 - e. Proceed with the next word as described above (c) and continue until the examination is complete. Score the REALM-R and record the result on the Patient Assessment Summary Form (Appendix 2).

ADHERENCE FACT:

“Approximately 40 to 44 Million adults in the US are functionally illiterate.”

Special considerations when using the REALM-R

1. Examiner Sensitivity

Many low-literacy patients will attempt to hide their deficiency. Ensure that you approach each patient with respect and compassion. You may need to provide encouragement and reassurance. A positive, respectful attitude is essential for all examiners. (Remember, many people with low literacy feel ashamed.) Be sensitive.

2. *Visual Acuity*

If the patient wears glasses, ask him or her to put them on for this test. The REALM-R is designed to be read by persons with 20/100 vision or better. The patient word list should be set in a font size of 18. In the studies utilizing the REALM-R, patients with worse vision were excluded. The REALM (long version of the REALM-R) has a visually impaired version using a font size of 28.

The REALM-R is produced here in font size 18 and can be found in Appendix 2.

3. *Pronunciation*

Dictionary pronunciation is the scoring standard.

4. *Dialect, Accent, or Articulation Problems:*

Count a word as correct if it is pronounced correctly and no additions or deletions have been made to the beginning or ending of the word. For example, a patient who says "jaundiced" would not receive credit for the word "jaundice"; "directs" would not receive credit for the word "directed"; "colon" would not receive credit for "colitis." Words pronounced with a dialect or accent should be counted as correct, provided there are no additions or deletions to the word. Particular attention should be paid to patients who use English as a second language.

ADHERENCE-FACT:

The average length of stay in hospitals due to medication noncompliance is 4.2 days.

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