

Health Literacy Month Founder Spotlights Critical Need for Better Understanding of Health Information; Offers Tools and Resources to Help

October is Health Literacy Month

(NAPSA)—October marks the fifth annual Health Literacy Month, a time to raise awareness about health literacy and promote the importance of understandable health communication in good health care. Helen Osborne, founder of Health Literacy Month, is encouraging individuals to use available tools and resources to improve their understanding and communication of health information, and to become greater advocates for their own health.

“At one time or another, health literacy affects everyone—patients, caregivers, family members and healthcare professionals,” said Osborne, President of Health Literacy Consulting. “It isn’t just about reading or writing. It is about individuals finding ways to better understand health information and becoming advocates for their own health to ensure they get the treatment and services they need. A little investment of time could yield a lifetime of good health care.”

A good first step toward better health literacy is to learn more about general health from available health information resources. Osborne suggests taking advantage of credible Internet sites, such as MerckSource.com, to stay current with pertinent health and medical news; to prepare questions about symptoms or conditions in advance of a doctor’s visit; and to

Reference:

1. Nielsen-Bohlman L, Panzer AM, Kindig DA, for the Committee on Health Literacy, Board on Neuroscience and Behavioral Health, Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press; 2003.

Tips For Better Health Literacy: When and How to Use Internet Health Tools and Resources

Any Time For Wellness:

- Stay current with health and medical news through daily health news headlines and/or sign up to receive a health e-newsletter.
- Learn about preventive care and strategies for maintaining health and wellness by using sources such as MerckSource.com and *The Merck Manual—Home Edition* that explain medical conditions and strategies for health and wellness.

Before A Doctor’s Visit:

- Make time with a doctor more productive—and feel more confident and informed—by being prepared for your doctor’s visit. Use topic-specific, prepared lists of questions to ask the doctor about symptoms or conditions.
- Save time in the doctor’s office by filling out health forms and records before you get to the office, including medical histories (both family and patient medical histories), prescriptions and previous test results.

After A Doctor’s Visit:

- Learn more after an appointment about a recently diagnosed condition, necessary medical tests or suggested lifestyle changes using such sources as MerckSource.com Condition Guides to help reinforce the information given by your healthcare provider.



learn more about recently diagnosed conditions, medical tests or suggested lifestyle changes imme-

diately following a doctor’s visit.

“Web sites such as MerckSource.com can be great places to start because these sites offer a variety of tools to help people improve their health knowledge, communicate more effectively with a health care provider and better understand their diagnosed conditions,” Osborne said. “From basic health definitions and easy-to-understand diagrams and pictures, to forms that help organize medical histories and records, these sites provide tools that can help build strong foundations for better health literacy.”

A recent report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) states that “approximately 90 million adults may lack the needed literacy skills to effectively use the U.S. Health system.”¹ The IOM report also stated that adults with limited health literacy have less knowledge of disease management, report poorer health status and are less likely to use preventive services.¹ Another IOM study found that 10 percent of adverse drug events were linked to errors in the use of the drug as a result of communication failure.¹

To access valuable health information and tools for improving health literacy, go to www.mercksource.com. For additional information on Health Literacy Month, visit www.healthliteracymonth.org.