

Understanding Medical Language: Simple is Better

Improving Your Health Is As Easy As “Ask Me 3”

(NAPSA)—Imagine you are at the doctor’s office. After your exam, your doctor says you have “diabetic neuropathy,” “hypertension” or “coronary disease.” How do you react? Do you know what this means?

What if, instead, your doctor says you have “nerve problems,” “high blood pressure,” or “heart disease?” You may recognize these terms, but do you know how they will affect your health? Do you know how to treat them? Do you understand what changes you have to make in your life?

If your health care visits leave you with more questions than answers, you are not alone. Most people want health information that is written in plain language, and easy to understand and use. Medical words are hard for many people to understand—no matter how much education they have. Tell your doctors, nurses and pharmacists when you do not understand the information they give you. It may help you learn how to better take care of yourself and your family.

You may not be able to change the way your health care providers talk. But you can take steps to help you get the answers you need:

1. Don’t be shy—ask questions. Make a list of questions to bring with you to your doctor so you do not forget to ask them. The Partnership for Clear Health Communication—a team of national health care groups—has set up the “Ask Me 3” program. “Ask Me 3” suggests three simple but important questions people can ask their health care providers:

- What is my main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

If you think of more questions after your visit, write them down. Call the doctor’s office when you return to your home or job to get answers to your questions.

2. Bring a family member or friend. This person may be able



to help you take notes and hear the provider’s instructions—in case you miss something.

3. Speak up. Tell your health care provider if you do not understand the information he or she has given you. Ask him or her to repeat the instructions until you know what you need to do.

4. Repeat instructions. After the health care provider gives you instructions, repeat them back to him or her. Make sure you’ve got them right.

5. Ask for more information. If your provider says you have a health problem, ask for extra information—such as a hotline number or brochure. It may help you figure out what is happening to you and how to treat it.

Work closely with your health care providers. They can advise you on ways to lead a healthy, active life. Try to understand all your medical information. This way you can be a more active partner in decisions about your and your family’s health.

For more on how to talk with your health care providers, ask him or her for a free “Ask Me 3” brochure. It comes in English and Spanish. You can also go to the Partnership for Clear Health Communication Web site at www.AskMe3.org. It has information on the “Ask Me 3” program and how it can help you. It also has a checklist to help you get ready for your next health care visit.