**Health Literacy Assessment for Capstone Products**

Until I began the tDPT program, health literacy was not something I gave much consideration. Health literacy has been defined as “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions”.4 A definition I like even better is “the ability to read, understand and act on health information”. **5** I was surprised to find that one third of adults in the United States have low health literacy.4 The VoiceThread on health literacy by DeWalt and Pignone helped me develop a better understanding of and appreciation for health literacy.2 As a pediatric physical therapist, it is important that my verbal communication and my written communication are clear and understood whether I am informing parents of their child’s progress, instructing parents in a home exercise program, or educating parents about an intervention.

The number of instruments available to assess health literacy surprised me. For my capstone, I developed two parent education products, a brochure and a PowerPoint presentation entitled *Hippotherapy for Children, A Guide for Parents*. My target audience was parents of children with neurological and musculoskeletal conditions interested in learning more about hippotherapy as an intervention to improve their child’s function. I used the following tools to guide the development of my products and to assess my products. For my PowerPoint and my brochure, I used Chiara Ojeda’s *Simple Design* suggestions for: simplicity, one idea per slide, unity, pictures, keeping the audience’s attention, and eliminating “fluff”.6 Since my PowerPoint will be viewed by parents on a website and potentially without narration, I was curious about its literacy demands. I’m not sure if this is a valid method, but I converted my presentation to word document and ran Microsoft Word readability statistics. According to the Flesch-Kincaid score, my presentation was at the 9th grade reading level, slightly off from the recommended 6th grade reading level.5 To compensate, I thought about narration and created a VoiceThread. Since the organization using my materials does not have VoiceThread access, other types of narration will have to be investigated.

For my brochure, I used font sizes of 12 or greater with the headings being larger than the main text.1Also, for the main text, I used dark letters on a light background.1 The more challenging part of creating the brochure was wording. I made multiple revisions to reduce words, syllables and sentences but still get the point across- not so easy. According to the Fry Formula, the literacy level of my brochure “was not suitable”. I’m not sure how to get around this given words like *hippotherapy*, *coordination,* and *developmental*. To assess the suitability of my brochure, I used the Suitability Assessment of Materials (SAM) instrument.**3** My brochure had a SAM rating of 73, which can be interpreted as “superior material”. With this, I was satisfied to move forward with the current version for my capstone, but in the near future, the literacy level may be something I revisit. To say the least, I will never view a PowerPoint or look at an educational brochure the same way again. This portion of the capstone project opened my eyes to something new, and I will use this new knowledge in daily practice.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control. Simply Put. A Guide for Creating Easy to Understand Materials. 3rd Ddition. April 2009. Accessed 4/22/14 from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/simply_put.pdf>.
2. DeWalt D, Pignone M. Health Literacy 101 Defining the Problem and What We Can Do About It. NC Program on Health Literacy. Lasted updated 12/09/08. Accessed 4/22/14 from <http://unc.voicethread.com/#q.b984634.i5249090>.
3. Doak CC, Doak LG, Root JH. Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills. 2nd Edition. Philadelphia, PA: JB Lippencott Company; 1996.
4. North Carolina Program on Health Literacy. What is Health Literacy? Accessed 4/22/14 from <http://nchealthliteracy.org/about.html>
5. North Carolina Health Literacy Council. Ask Me 3 Presentation. Accessed from 4/22/14 from <http://www.readingconnections.org/nchealthliteracy/hp_toolkit.html>.
6. Ojeda C. Simple Design. Accessed 4/22/14 from https://sakai.unc.edu/access/meleteDocs/content/private/meleteDocs/915977d8-ef83-45a9-a96c-46cfa4eff966/uploads/simpledesign-130305201516-phpapp01.pdf.