JacobsOsinski\_Health Literacy Assignment

Health literacy is an important aspect of our capstone because our materials were presented to individuals with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). MS is a variable disease and affects people of different ages and education levels. Because MS is a chronic disease, some people with MS may have worked with a large number of health care professionals and be more familiar with medical jargon. Health literacy is also important because cognitive changes can be a symptom of MS and may affect someone’s ability to understand and process materials. We really wanted to incorporate all components of the definition from Healthy People 2010 shared in the health literacy voice thread: “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”1 Another point that resonated with us was the issue that good health information is hard to come by.1 This was a motivation for the development of our capstone.

For our capstone we held a wellness event for individuals with MS as a way to allow people to obtain information relevant to their health and wellness. This interactive, in person, event allowed for better processing and understanding of the information. Additionally we provided handouts to guide learning at the event and allow them access to the information in the future. We knew in advance we would have a diverse group of individuals with MS, ranging in age as well as time since diagnosis. There are several steps we took to ensure our presentation and educational materials were appropriate for our audience.

Our capstone materials included a PowerPoint presentation, along with a goal handout and exercise handout for each participant. We wanted the information in these materials to be appropriate for our audience. Our goal was to keep materials between the 4th-6th grade reading level as recommended in the voice thread.1 We incorporated simple wording, pictures, highlighted key points, and minimized information about disease statistics and complex anatomy and physiology. For the presentation portion we wanted to engage our audience by using good communication skills and addressing their specific concerns. We used health literacy resources from Harvard to develop materials using plain language, good organization, and simple layout.2 We used the “readability statistics” on Microsoft Word to confirm that our handouts were at an appropriate reading level: the “Exercise Tips” handout was at 4.6 and the “Goals” handout was at 6.9 (Flesh-Kincaid grade level).3

References:

1. DeWalt D, Pignone M. *Health Literacy 101 Defining the Problem and What We Can Do About It.* [Voice Thread, Powerpoint]. UNC-Chapel Hill: Department of Medicine. Last updated 12/09/08. Presented to PHYT854. Spring 2014.
2. Rudd RE. Guidelines for Creating Materials: Resources for Developing and Assessing Materials. Health Literacy Studies. <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/files/2012/09/resources_for_creating_materials.pdf>. Accessed 2/24/14.
3. Tool 13. Assessing Readability Level Reading Formulas. <http://www.ihs.gov/healthcommunications/documents/toolkit/Tool13.pdf>. Accessed 2/24/14.