

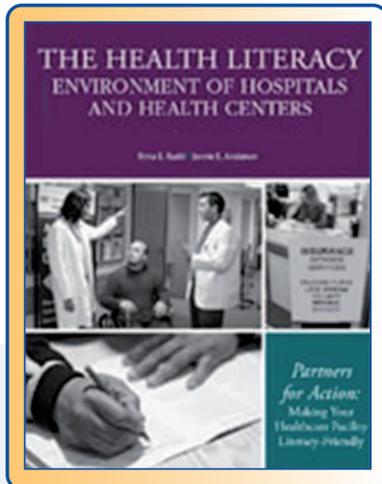
# Reducing health literacy barriers: how do medical doctors speak to patients?

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## Background

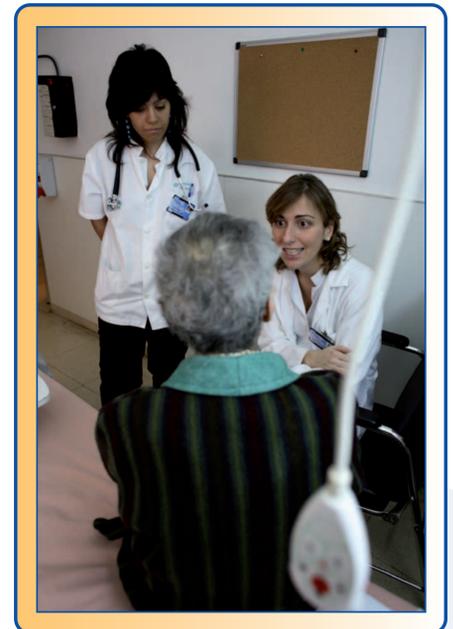
Health outcomes are influenced by patients' health literacy skills but also by health professionals' communication skills. We report on a survey to assess patients' perception of medical personnel's communication skills and legibility of written materials.



## Methodology

We assessed the perception of patients about written and oral communication for one clinical process, the cataract, in 9 hospitals members of the HPH Catalanian network. Written documents including informed consent and patient education materials were assessed using standard legibility formulae.

Patients were then distributed a satisfaction survey comprising 21 items related to legibility of patient materials distributed before and after surgery, opportunity to ask questions and explanations provided by medical and nursing personnel. Answers were either dichotomous or included an assessment scale.



## Results



Overall, 313 patients (50.8% women) participated in the survey with a mean age of 71 and low educational level. Education: 20.1% illiterate, 41.5% primary education.

Patients were medium to highly satisfied with many of the items assessed (asking questions, doctors explaining medical terms), although substantial and statistically significant differences exist between hospitals ( $<0.001$ ).

**Table 1: Survey results**

Question	Total response (%yes; mean)	Min-Max
Were you greeted during your visit?	95.2%	84.0-100.0
Did you feel welcome?	93.5%	80.0-100.0
Did you find the informed consent easy/difficult?	6.9 (1.9)	5.7-8.0
Difficulty of patient information before the intervention?	7.2 (1.7)	6.4-8.4
Difficulty of patient information after the intervention?	7.6 (1.7)	6.5-8.6
Where you able to ask questions?	88.1%	74.3-100
How was your question answered?	7.7 (1.7)	6.5-8.6
Did professionals explain medical terms?	83.7%	68.8-94.6
To what extent were explanations helpful?	7.3 (1.9)	5.9-8.0
Did you ask questions during your visits?	79.8%	57.1-100
Were they well received?	92.9%	78.6-100
Did you feel at ease asking?	7.2 (1.7)	4.9-7.7
Where you provided with a phone number?	73.1%	51.4-100
How would you judge the treatment?	8.1 (1.6)	7.0-8.8
Would you recommend the hospital to your family?	96.7%	86.7-100

We assessed associations between individual items and overall assessment of treatment. Regression analysis suggests that overall judgment is associated with key health-literacy related items, such as difficulty of patient-information material, whether explanations were helpful, and whether patients felt at ease asking questions.

## Conclusions

- On average, patients' assessment of oral communication is rated high even though we were able to identify statistically significant differences between hospitals. Some of the results are inconsistent in the sense that patients with low education level rate their satisfaction high with material that requires a high level of education for comprehension.
- Social desirability bias may influence the ratings in these groups of patients and further, more independent assessments are needed to target future improvement activities in oral communication.