Assessment of Oral Health
Literacy: One Approach

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Health Literacy is inextricably linked to improving oral health... especially among low income groups
Health Literacy is:

the interaction between skills of individuals and demands of the healthcare system(s)

IOM Report 2004
Our Challenge is to:

- Address the mismatch between demands of the healthcare system and the skills of those using and working in the healthcare system(s).
Users (Patients) Need to:

- Know how to locate and navigate a health facility
- Read, understand, and complete many kinds of forms to receive treatment and payment reimbursement
- Articulate their signs and symptoms
- Listen to providers
Users Need to: (cont.)

• Know about various types of health professionals and what services they provide and how to access those services

• Trust us

• Know how and when to ask questions or ask for clarification when they do not understand

• Understand their options in all procedures
Most Importantly

• Users need to understand that oral health is part of total health and we can keep our mouths healthy.

In Maryland we are focusing on caries prevention because that is our priority. But, this model would work for any content area.
We opted to conduct

- A state-wide oral health literacy needs assessment
- We had used this process previously in another content area
Conducting an Assessment to Meet this Challenge

• Establish local or state needs
• Determine what the public knows and does regarding caries prevention & early detection
• Determine public’s perceptions of providers communication skills
• Determine what other publics (Head Start, WIC) know and do regarding caries prevention & early detection.
Conducting an Assessment to Meet this Challenge (cont.)

- Determine what health providers know and practice regarding caries prevention & early detection
- Determine communication techniques used by healthcare providers
- Conduct environmental scans of dental facilities
Surveys

- Mail surveys of dentists, dental hygienists, physicians and nurse practitioners
- Mail surveys of WIC and Head Start personnel
- Phone survey of adults 18 years of age and older with child 6 years of age and younger in home
Focus Groups:

- Focus groups or 1:1 interviews with dentists, dental hygienists, physicians and nurse practitioners
- Focus groups with low income adults (4 English; 2 Spanish)
- Focus groups with Head Start and WIC personnel
Results: General Public

- Does not understand how to prevent dental caries
- Does not know what fluoride is or what it does
- Does not know what sealants are or what they are used for
- Neither adults nor children drink tap water, especially low income
Results: Health Providers

• Many, including dentists and dental hygienists do not have a good understanding about how to prevent tooth decay.

• Many/most do not provide dental sealants

• Most health care providers do not use recommended communication techniques
Based on the Surveys & Focus Groups

- We have a good understanding about what interventions are needed for the next steps and these focus groups and surveys prepared us for conducting environmental scans in community-based dental clinics.
Oral Health Literacy Framework

Adapted from the IOM Report 2004
One Approach is to Use AHRQ’s Toolkit
The purpose of conducting environmental scans is:

- to determine the user friendliness of a facility.
- to determine if they are patient centered.

We have conducted these scans in FQHC’s and county health departments in Maryland and are preparing the findings.
Environmental Scans Consist of:

- Phone interview with clinic director: demographics
- Review of website and phone system
- On site reviews of signage and posters
- Collect consent forms and educational materials for analysis
- Personal interviews with patients
- Survey of DDS & DH’s regarding use of communication techniques
Challenges

- Recognizing differences among partners
- Standardizing health messages for consistency
- Persistence
- Gathering data for baseline AND using the data
- Enough personnel, and of course, funding
- Persistence
Recall Our Challenge is to:

• Address the mismatch between demands of the healthcare system and the skills of those using and working in the healthcare system(s).
How can You use what we have Learned?

- Survey instruments
- Focus Group Guides
- Environmental scans
- Don’t assume everyone is on the same page
Armed with these data:

- Develop, implement, evaluate and revise interventions for specific target groups
- Educate policy makers about how to prevent dental caries.
- Implement policies that foster the improvement of oral health literacy.
Health Literacy is inextricably linked to improving oral health... especially among low income groups.

Each of us has a role, opportunity and responsibility to improve oral health literacy.

Thank you!