Health Literacy Recommendations

1. Use simple words.
   - Limit words with more than 2 syllables. Substitute simpler words whenever possible. (i.e. use problems instead of complications, check instead of access, find out instead of determine).
   - In some cases, medical and technical terms are necessary. Explain and define all medical and technical terms either in the document itself, or include a glossary.
   - It may be helpful to consult An Author's Guide Substitute Word List

2. Write short sentences.
   - Limit sentences to 25 words or less.
   - Avoid using compound sentences.

3. Write short paragraphs.
   - Cover only one main point in a paragraph.
   - Paragraphs should be in block form. Do not indent the first line of a paragraph.
   - Skip one line (return) between paragraphs.
   - Text should be left justified. (Do not center text, right justify, or full justify text).

4. Use the active voice.
   - Your doctor may order a blood test. (Not A blood test may be ordered by your doctor.)
   - Write your blood pressure in your home monitoring record. (Not Your blood pressure should be written in your home monitoring record.)
   - Take your medicine every day. (Not The medicine needs to be taken daily.)
5. Activate the patient.

- Speak directly to the patient. *Diabetes puts you at risk for vision problems.* (Not *People with diabetes are at risk for vision problems*).

- Include the patient. *Your health care provider will talk with you about your treatment options.* (Not *Your health care provider will decide what treatment is best for you.*)

- Empower the patient. *You are the most important member of your health care team.*

- Provide action steps. Tell the patient what to do and give examples.

- Link benefits to actions. Explain not only what to do but why it is important.

- Encourage goal setting.

- Provide resources: refer to programs or services (Diabetes Self Management Training), list helpful web sites and hotlines (Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line). Encourage patients to ask their health care provider for more information.

- Include active elements:
  
  a. Use questions as headings and provide the answer in text (What is Lyme disease? What are the symptoms of diabetes? How is high blood pressure treated?)
  
  b. Use checklists to summarize main points and reinforce action steps.
  
  c. Include worksheets that encourage patients to write in information (Home Blood Pressure Record, Medication List, Meal Planning, Questions I want to Ask My Doctor).

6. Type fonts

- Use Times New Roman for main body text. Minimum size is 12 point with 15 point spacing.

- Use *Arial bold* for headings and subheadings.

7. Layout

- Text should be in columns. Long lines of text that go across the entire page are difficult for low literacy patients and those with vision problems.

- Use plenty of write space.

- Do not use *italics* or *underline text*. Use bold for emphasis.
Use color sparingly. It is best to only use one accent color in a document. Color can be used for headings and subheadings, but should not be used for large blocks of text.

Suggested colors include:

- **Pantone 208 (Word: R152, G16, B57) (Web: 99, 00, 33)**
- **Pantone 238 (Word: R32, G76, B128) (Web: 20, 4C, 80)**
- **Pantone 343 (Word: R8, G88, B64) (Web: 08, 58, 40)**

NOTE: These colors adapt well for printing on black and white printers. For additional color options, consult Corporate Communications.

Screens of color may be used to accent boxes or blocks of text. Use this for special instructions, contact information, warnings, and other important information that you want to highlight. Screens should not be used for large blocks of text. The color you choose for headings and subheading should be the same color used for screens. For best results, use the color at 10-20% and use black text.

- **Pantone 208**
  - Use one accent color per document. Color screens should be 10-20% of the full color.
- **Pantone 238**
  - Color screens can highlight contact information, special instructions, warnings, and other important information.
- **Pantone 343**
  - Black text on a light background is best. White text on a dark color screen is harder to read.

8. **Graphics, illustrations, photos and clip art.**

- Graphics and illustrations can increase comprehension of text for low literacy patients. They also add to the appeal or your document. Graphics can enhance (and sometimes can change the meaning) of your message, so choose appropriate graphics.

- Simple line drawings work well for medical illustrations (procedures, anatomy, instructions).

- Photos can help patients identify and relate to the information.

- Only use graphics if they help explain the text, show examples or help illustrate action steps.

- Limit graphics to one or two per page. Include white space around the image. Too many graphics or graphics placed too close to text clutter the document and make it hard to read.

- Cartoons and silly clip art make your document look unprofessional. Consult Graphic Arts regarding selection and use of graphics in your document.