

Improving Medication Adherence and Decreasing Deviations and Audit Findings by Using a Standardized Health Literacy Screening

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1. Background

It's estimated that over two million new cancer diagnoses will occur in 2026. Advances in treatments have improved survival and care, but the complexity of clinical trials can make navigation difficult.

A Rutgers Cancer Institute internal audit found a gap: no patient enrolled in a trial had a health literacy screening. Annually, over 700 patients enroll in 200+ adult and pediatric trials; about 49 percent are minorities or underrepresented, 20 percent are Spanish-speaking, and 37 percent are 65+, all of whom are at higher risk of limited health literacy. Understanding this is vital for the trial team.

Health literacy affects understanding and use of health information, shaped by personal, cultural, social, and political factors, and it impacts decision-making. It's a common, often unnoticed barrier to trial participation.

Reviewing five years of deviation data and recent audits shows ongoing challenges with pill diary completion and medication compliance. Some participants repeatedly misunderstand trial requirements, possibly due to low health literacy. Re-education efforts have been ineffective. Addressing health literacy and customizing interventions could improve pill diary and medication adherence.

2. Goals

This project aims to incorporate health literacy screening conducted by research nurse clinicians (RNCs) during informed consent discussions for a clinical trial. The health literacy screening score will help RNCs identify trial participants who may need additional support in understanding trial requirements, such as completing pill diaries and ensuring medication adherence.

3. Solutions and Methods

The short assessment of health literacy tool (SAHL) will be used by RNCs to assess participants aged 18 and older in a clinical trial for their comprehension and pronunciation of health-related terms. SAHL scores will be recorded in the electronic medical record (Epic) and will aid in tailoring patient care based on these scores, particularly in activities such as managing pill diaries and providing education on medication adherence.

The SAHL method involves using laminated flashcards to present 18 health-related terms one at a time. Participants will read each term aloud and will be tested on both comprehension and pronunciation. Based on their performance, participants can receive a SAHL score of 15 or higher (indicating adequate

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health literacy) or less than 14 (indicating limited health literacy). The administration of the test takes approximately two to three minutes. For Spanish-speaking participants, an interpreter will be available to administer the questions. The final score will be documented in Epic.

4. Outcomes

The goals of this project are to reduce deviations in pill diary completion and improve medication compliance. Additionally, we will see whether the reduction in repetitive deviations for a trial participant decreases. This will be measured by tracking reductions in deviations and audit findings.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Future directions include collaborating with Rutgers community outreach and engagement to develop population-specific tools for trial participants with low literacy levels.