

HEALTH LITERACY CHAMPION TIPS

BECOME A HEALTH LITERACY
CHANGEMAKER



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BECOME A HEALTH LITERACY CHAMPION...

JOIN THE HEALTH LITERACY MOVEMENT!

My name is Kristine Sørensen. I am the Founder of the Global Health Literacy Academy and I am pleased to share my health literacy champion tips with you.

Perhaps you are new to the field of health literacy or perhaps you are already experienced. In any case, I am delighted to work with you on the advancement of health literacy around the globe. Thanks for joining the health literacy movement.

Kristine Sorensen



HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy is linked to literacy and entails the knowledge, motivation, and competencies to access, understand, appraise and apply information to form judgement and make decisions in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion to promote and maintain quality of life during the life course with the support of professionals, services and systems.

Sørensen et al. 2012; Sørensen, 2020

Health literacy is an empowering and enabling capacity of people to act in terms of health protection, health care, disease prevention and health promotion.

Health literacy can be understood as the combination of personal competencies and situational resources needed for people to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health. It includes the capacity to communicate, assert and act upon these decisions to manage health issues. Health literacy responsiveness, in turn, describes the way in which services, organizations and systems make health information and resources available and accessible to people according to health literacy strengths and limitations.

Unfortunately, many have poor health literacy which limits their ability to manage their health. In addition, health systems of today are complex with a wide range of stakeholders involved. Therefore, many find it a barrier to engage with health services and sustain their health.

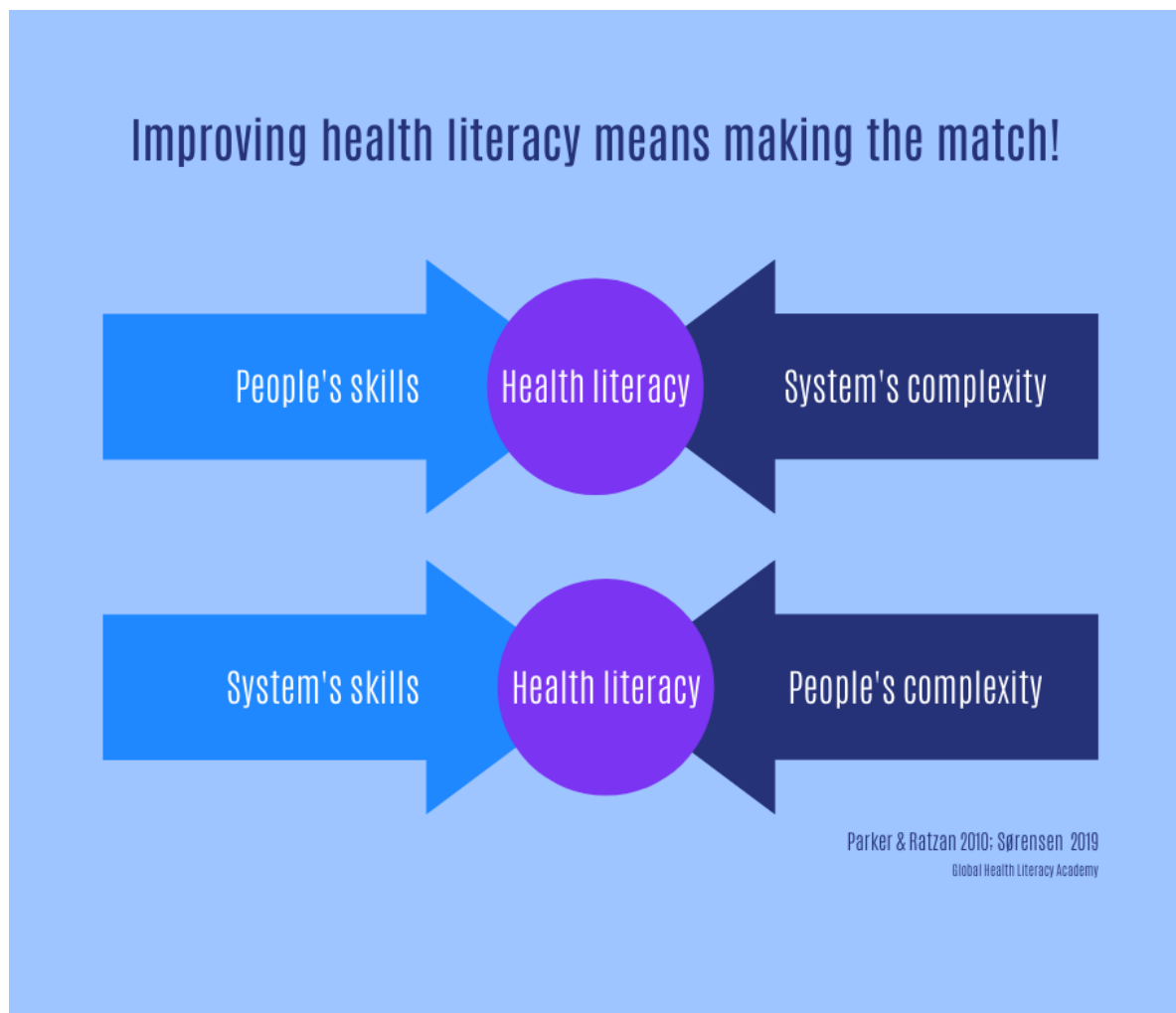
By applying the health literacy lens at work and in our daily lives, we can improve our efforts by making interactions, procedures and services more transparent and accessible for the people whom we serve.



MAKING THE MATCH

Health literacy is a matter of respect and dignity.

Human-centered services are grounded in a health literacy approach that speaks to hearts and minds. Health literacy focuses on developing the skills of people to match the complexity of societal systems as well as building the system-based capacity to match people's complexity. When we apply the principle of co-production, we ensure to work with people, rather than for people. In our service design, we can integrate user-experiences to enhance the quality of our work.



HEALTH LITERACY CHAMPIONS

A champion is someone who has won the first prize in a competition, contest, or enthusiastically fights for a person, a cause, or a principle whom or which the champion supports or defends.

Cambridge English Dictionary, 2018

Health literacy is about rights, access and transparency. The promotion of health literacy implies that we take a personal responsibility for health and become involved in social and political processes that address the root causes of health inequalities as well as inequalities in access to care.

Essentially, we as health literacy champions support and enable people to:

- express their views and concerns regarding health and quality of life,
- access health information and services,
- defend and promote their rights and responsibilities in terms of health,
- explore choices and options relevant for healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion,
- create health literate organizations to facilitate better services,
- develop health literate settings such as schools, work places, and communities,
- educate the workforce on health literacy,
- ensure monitoring of health literacy, and
- develop action plans to accommodate apparent health literacy needs
- invest in health literacy as a societal asset.

Health literacy is a cornerstone in modern societal systems aiming to provide person-centered, evidence-based and quality-driven healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion. Health literate champions make it easier for people to access, understand, appraise and apply information to manage their health and find it rewarding to see how an empowered person becomes more active and engaged and take control regarding self-care and needed actions for better outcomes. Working in partnerships enhance the success of the combined efforts at all levels and in any setting.

HEALTH LITERACY CHAMPION TIPS

*Each one of us can make a difference.
Together we make change.*

Barbara Mikulski

As health literacy champions we can enable positive health literacy changes for the settings within we live, love and work and for the public good and be a powerful voice to enhance the health literacy efforts provided.

- Being aware of health literacy is a strong starting point. Ask yourself how and why health literacy matters to you and your work and the community or organization that you are involved with.
- Next, focus on understanding where the assets of health literacy make wonders and where you see gaps in your daily work. It can, for example, be in the encounters with the people you serve; in the ways of communication; and in the management of health-related services.
- In addition, explore what options you have for improving the gaps. Engage with your clients, your colleagues and management team to identify solutions. Often small changes can create a substantial change.
- Lastly, apply the most suitable and feasible ideas and monitor the impact carefully. It can be changing a form to make it more readable; introduce a user panel; develop a new user-centered approach to enhance the user journey, engage the management in change towards the provision of more health literate services and essentially promoting a health literate organizational culture.

Don't be overwhelmed from a start. Being aware of health literacy and how it can be addressed is an important beginning. Observe for a while how health literacy is at stake in your work and your ability to identify the assets and gaps will be enhanced with time. Being able to listen, learn, delearn, and relearn are essential skills of health literacy champions.

GETTING STARTED

While health education is about planting seeds of health information, health literacy is about understanding the soil: it is a bottom-up perspective focused on understanding people as lifelong learners and their differences.

Roy Batterham, 2018

Adopting a health literate approach to our work implies that we increase the capability of noticing people's needs, preferences and assets. Here are some tips to improve your practice as health literacy champion:

- Using *universal precautions* in terms of health literacy suggest that we do not take for granted that people have high literacy. In contrast, we can always use plain language for a start and then make sure we tailor our communication based on the actual skills of the person whom we communicate with as the conversation goes along.
- In our communication, we can reshape our focus from "*what is the matter with you?*" to "*what matters to you?*" in order to tap into the needs, preferences and assets of the person whom we engage with.
- Importantly, health literacy is *not* a proxy for a person's educational level. Health literacy is content- and context-specific, so we need to zoom in on the person's needs, preferences and assets in the actual situation to ensure we support with the most timely and appropriate solution possible.
- Adopt a *resource perspective*, rather than focusing on the deficits or problems. Health literacy is closely linked to empowerment and we can start by meeting people where they are, focus on what they are already doing and what they value; instead of risking that we might fall into our own false assumptions about their problems.
- Health literacy is a *means to the development of quality of life*. Health concerns might not be the top priority when people strive with other life concerns. We can help focus on "*first things first*".

Health literacy happens nearly everywhere, every day, with everyone. It is built on encounters with many forms and sources of information, it can be shaped and promoted. Thanks for being a health literacy champion and for joining the efforts of advancing health literacy for all.



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FACE THE CHALLENGE BE THE CHANGE

