Learning activity: "Wall of Words"
Assessing the quality of patient education materials

Goal:

To provide a visual demonstration of how the complexity of material can be a barrier to communication between providers and patients.

Supplies:

- Samples of health information from printed material or webpages.
- Copies of the Clear Language Checklist.
- Lego® blocks and people.

Method:

1. Choose two samples of materials on the same topic (from print material or webpage) – one that is clearly written and one that is complex. Or use 'before and after' samples of complex material that has been rewritten in clear language.

2. Provide a copy of the Checklist for each group.

3. Provide each group with a pile of Lego® bricks, and at least two Lego® people. One Lego® person represents the health care provider, the other is the patient and/or family.

4. In groups of 3 to 6, learners assess the information using the checklist. If there is time, each group reviews both samples.

5. For each "No" or "Not sure" response, place a Lego® brick between the provider and the patient.

6. After the checklist is completed, each group shows their wall and summarize their experience.

Debrief and discuss:

Whereas one change may not make a difference, many simple changes to a document can decrease the barriers to understanding written information.

Options:

- Tailor the chosen materials for different audiences, such as teens, seniors, people with cancer or diabetes.

- In a large group, this activity can be done as a demonstration, with the material and checklist on screen.

- Use a more comprehensive checklist, such as the one available on page 104 of Writing health information for patients and families (Wizowski, Harper & Hutchings, 2008).

- Instead of Lego®, use a visual representation of the provider, patient and wall.

Provider

Patient
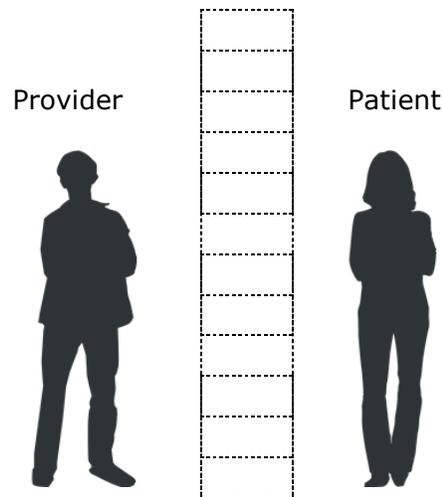
Clear Language Checklist

Describe the target audience

Writing		Yes	No	Not sure	N/A
	Is the purpose clearly stated at the start?				
	Is it written in familiar, everyday language?				
	Are unfamiliar words & acronyms defined?				
	Are sentences less than 20 words?				
	Is it written in active voice?				
	Is it written in a conversational style?				
	Is it organized in short sections (paragraphs 6-8 lines)?				
	Do sections have useful headings or questions?				
	Is it organized in a logical way and easy to follow?				
	Does it clearly tell readers what they need to do?				
	Does it tell readers how to get more information or help?				

Design		Yes	No	Not sure	N/A
	Are there only 1 or 2 styles of type (fonts)?				
	Is the size of the type easy to read?				
	Are subheadings and headings in larger type?				
	Are upper and lower case letters used throughout?				
	Do paragraphs line up at the left margin only?				
	Does the most important information stand out?				
	Is there white space at margins and between sections?				
	Are bullets used to present lists?				
	Do pictures or colour help find or explain information?				
	Are pictures realistic and appropriate for the audience?				

Overall		Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
	How suitable is the material for the audience?				
	How likely is the material to achieve its purpose?				
	How would you rate the quality of the communication?				