



September 8, 2020

David W. Baker, MD, MPH, FACP  
Executive Vice President, Healthcare Quality Evaluation  
The Joint Commission  
One Renaissance Blvd.  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

Dear Dr. Baker,

In an effort to make hospitals more accountable for health literacy best practices, Karen Komondor, RN, established the National Council to Improve Patient Safety through Health Literacy and brought together healthcare professionals with expertise in health literacy from across the country to develop a plan of action. The National Council's work culminated in the development of the enclosed proposal to the Joint Commission, recommending health literacy certification for organizations.

Dr. Baker, I know you're aware of the well-established relationship between health literacy and health outcomes. In 2006, you proposed a conceptual framework to explain the potential causal pathways. More than a decade later, many healthcare organizations still lack awareness of the impact of health literacy on patient outcomes and importantly, how to mitigate the associated risk. Numerous resources and tools are available to guide organizations but are not widely known. Some organizations have incorporated health literacy best practices into their culture, but are not nationally recognized for this work. A certification by the Joint Commission in health literacy would provide validation of the work, and also facilitate greater diffusion and implementation of health literacy best practices.

The increased risk for poor outcomes is borne by the most vulnerable in society, as low health literacy is disproportionately found among members of minority groups and persons of low income. Certification for health literacy would promote an environment of continuous improvement in the care of patients, especially important to achieving equity in outcomes. The complexity and fragmentation of our current healthcare system increases the burden on all people to understand and use health information.

The Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) is a nonprofit, 501 (c)(3) healthcare public benefit charity, with the mission of empowering people to better health.

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To fulfill our mission, we:

- Publish easy-to-read, easy-to-use “What To Do For Health” self-help health book series in multiple language
- Host a national annual continuing education health literacy conference
- Publish the peer-reviewed, open access health literacy journal, *Health Literacy Research and Practice*
- Provide health literacy communication consulting services including rewrite and redesign
- Sponsor the Health Literacy Solutions Center with over 5,000 active participants on the discussion list

IHA has collaborated with Cynthia Baur, PhD, Horowitz Center for Literacy and Michael Paasche-Orlow, MD, Health Literacy Annual Research Conference (HARC) on the implementation of an innovative conference format consisting of cross-disciplinary sessions highlighting current research, practice, and policy.

I strongly support this proposal for the Joint Commission to develop a certification program for health literacy. This is well aligned with our mission and the Joint Commission’s commitment to patient/family-centered care and stance for racial justice and equity. IHA, other organizations and the National Council stand ready to support the Joint Commission in this endeavor.

Being recognized by the Joint Commission for health literacy through a certification program may provide the impetus organizations need for the resource investment. While the Joint Commission offers many certifications for highly specialized clinical services, this would be a certification program that all hospitals and healthcare organizations could earn. Certification will lead to more healthcare organizations implementing health literacy practices and has the potential to reduce gaps in health outcomes and make health information accessible to every patient.

If you have further inquiries please feel free to call or e-mail me at the contact information listed below.

Sincerely,



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