

# Health Literacy: The Hidden Risk

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- Disclosure of Conflict of Interest Information:
- I have no existing conflict of information to disclose
- This information is current as of 10-7-2008

# Up to 1/2 of US population may be at risk for...

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- Medical misunderstandings
- Mistakes
- Excess hospitalizations
- Poor health outcomes

# Why are they at risk?

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- Reliance on the written word for patient instruction
- Increasingly complex health system
  - More medications
  - More tests and procedures
  - Growing self-care requirements

# Changes in the health care system

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	<u>35 Years Ago</u>	<u>Today</u>
<b>Treatment of Acute Myocardial Infarction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 - 6 weeks bed rest in hospital</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2-4 days in hospital (M&amp;R Guidelines)</li></ul>
<b>Available Prescription Drugs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 650</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10,000 +</li></ul>
<b>Treatment of new onset diabetes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 weeks in hospital</li><li>• 2 hours a day of diabetic education classes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• outpatient</li><li>• 0-3 hours diabetic education classes</li><li>• written materials</li><li>• internet</li><li>• telemedicine</li></ul>

# Definitions:

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## **General Literacy:**

“ An individual’s ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

National Literacy Act of 1991

## **Health Literacy:**

“The degree to which individuals have the capacity, to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

Healthy People 2010

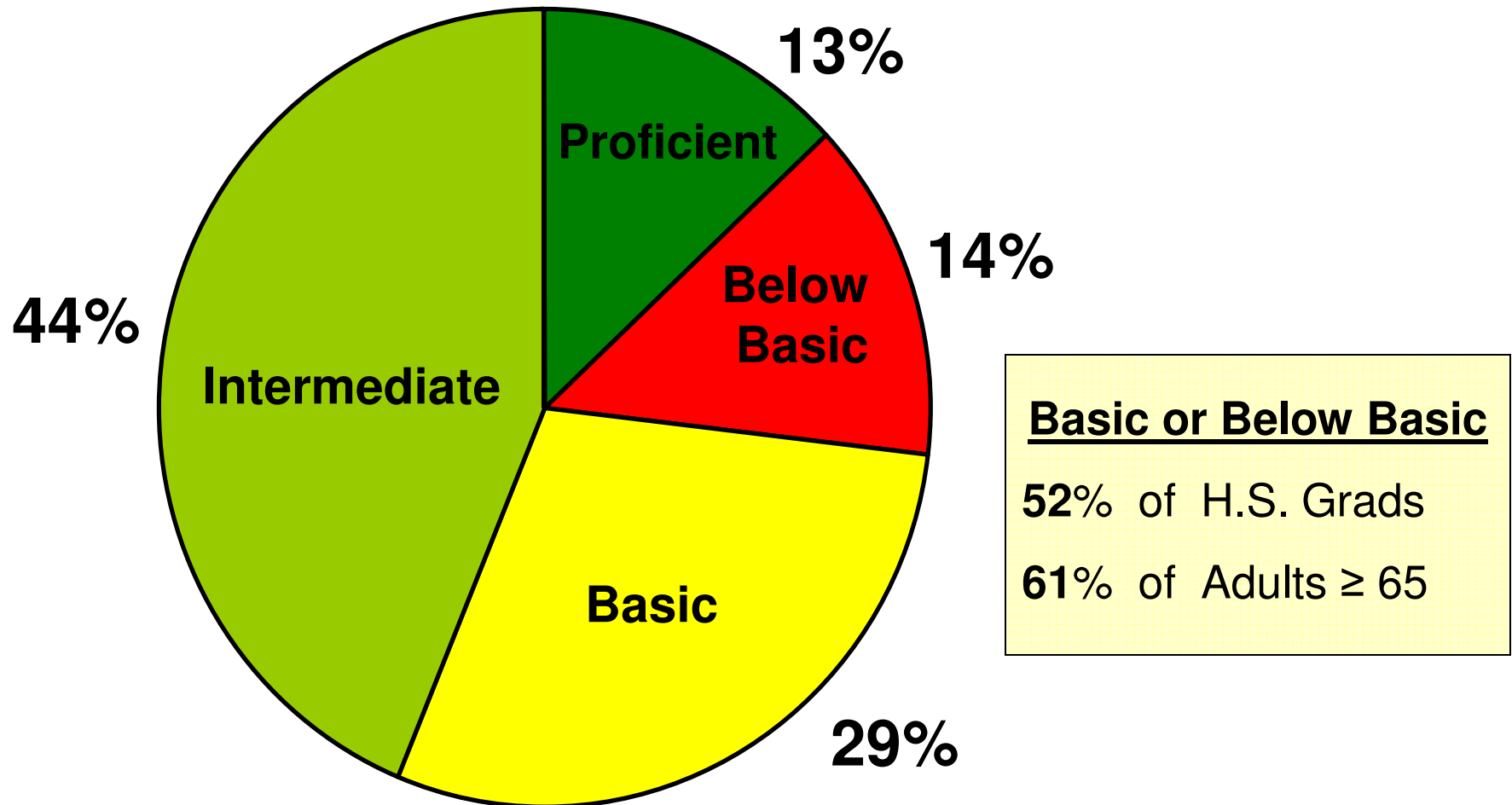
# Definitions:

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## Health Literacy:

- The ability to read, understand and **act upon** health care information
- Act upon- means actually do the work required in the care plan, reach the goals and sustain them through the normal constant changes of daily living.
- To “function on the job” of being a patient and “achieve one’s goals”...

# 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy



*93 Million Adults have Basic or Below Basic Literacy*

# Sample Question

Seventy-eight percent of what specific group agree that their school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas?

## Parents and Teachers Evaluate Parental Involvement at Their School

*Do you agree or disagree that...?*

	Total	Level of School		
		Elementary	Junior High	High School

Our school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in sports, arts, and other nonsubject areas

Parents	77	76	74	79
Teachers	77	73	77	85

Our school does a good job of encouraging parental involvement in educational areas

Parents	73	82	71	64
Teachers	80	84	78	70

Our school only contacts parents when there is a problem with their child

Parents	55	46	62	63
Teachers	23	18	22	33

Our school does not give parents the opportunity for any meaningful roles

Parents	22	18	22	28
Teachers	8	8	12	7

Source: The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987

### % Correct

**36%** All Adults

**0%** < Basic

**4%** Basic

# Sample of Tasks from NAAL

Skill Level	Health Literacy Tasks
Proficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Calculate an employee's share of health insurance costs for a year, using a table that shows monthly costs.</li></ul>
Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Determine what time to take a Rx med from the label</li><li>• Determine when child should get a vaccine based on chart of all childhood vaccines and ages.</li></ul>

# Sample of Tasks from NAAL

Skill Level	Health Literacy Tasks
Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After reading a short simply written article about how hypertension lacks symptoms, explain why it is difficult for people to know if they have hypertension</li></ul>
Below Basic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Circle the date of a medical appointment on an appointment slip</li></ul>

# What is it like?

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- The following passage simulates what a reader with low general literacy sees on the printed page.
- Read the entire passage out loud.
- You have 1 minute to read.
- Hint: The words are written backwards and the first word is “cleaning”

**GNINAEELC – Ot erussa hgih ecnamrofrep,  
yllacidoirep naelc eht epat sdaeh dna  
natpac revenehw uoy eciton na  
noitalumucca fo tsud dna nworb-red edixo  
selcitrapp. Esu a nottoc baws denetsiom  
htiw lyporposi lohocla. Eb erus on lohocla  
sehcuot eht rebbur strap, sa ti sdnep ot yrd  
dna yllautneve kcarc eht rebbur. Esu a  
pmad tholc ro egnops ot naelc eht tenibac.  
A dlim paos, ekil gnihsawhsid tnegreted,  
lliw pleh evomer esaerg ro lio.**

# What is it like?

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- How do you clean the capstan?

# What is it like?

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- Show video: “Help patients understand”

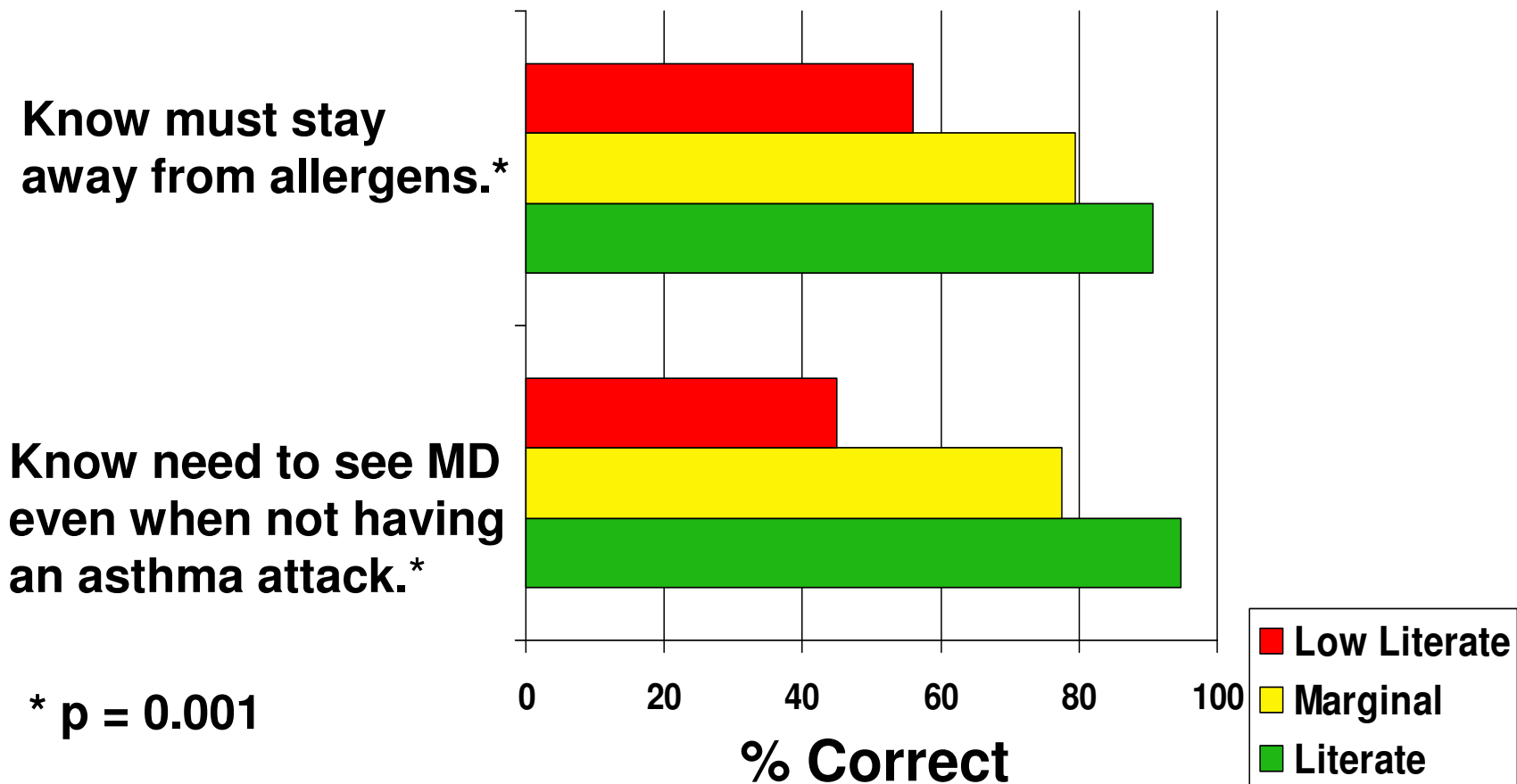
# What do we know from a decade of research?

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- **Low health literacy leads to:**
  - Lower health knowledge and less healthy behaviors.
  - Poorer health outcomes
  - Greater health costs
- **Specific communication techniques may enhance health literacy.**

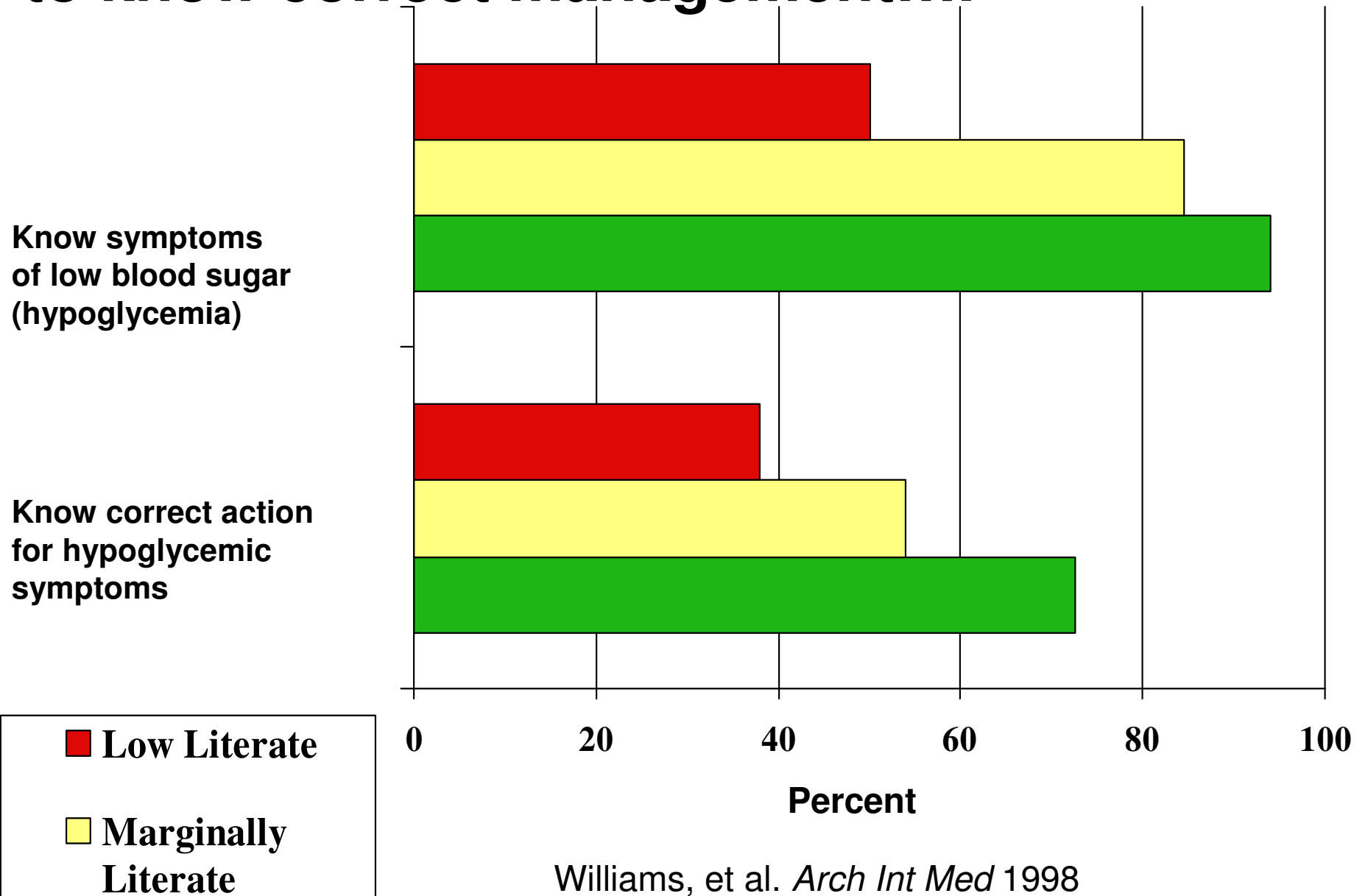
AHRQ, 2004; IOM, 2004; Schwartzberg, 2005

# Poor reading skills correlate with less knowledge of asthma



Williams, Baker, Honig et al. *Chest*. 1998

# Low literate diabetic patients less likely to know correct management....



# Health knowledge deficits for patients with low literacy...

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- Patients with asthma less likely to know how to use an inhaler
  - Patients with diabetes less likely to know symptoms of hypoglycemia
  - Patients with hypertension less likely to know that weight loss and exercise lower blood pressure
  - Mothers less likely to know how to read a thermometer.

# Recommended one-on-one communication skills:

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1. Conduct patient-centered visits
2. Explain things clearly in plain language
3. Focus on key messages and repeat
4. Use a “teach back” or “show me” technique to check for understanding
5. Use patient-friendly educational materials to enhance interaction.

# Removing Barriers to Better, Safer Care:

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- Patients have the right to understand health care information that is necessary for them to safely care for themselves,
- Healthcare professionals have a duty to provide information in simple, clear language and to check that patients have understood the information before ending the conversation.

# Designing a safer, shame-free health care environment

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- Education of all staff
- System wide communication strategies
- Greater understanding of what the patient needs in order to function successfully

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*Getting an idea should be like  
sitting down on a pin:  
it should make you jump up  
and do something.*

E.L. Simpson

# Who to contact for more information:

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- Website: [www.amafoundation.org/go/healthliteracy](http://www.amafoundation.org/go/healthliteracy)
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