October is Health Literacy Month

What is health literacy?
Health literacy means using many different skills to get, understand, communicate and use information to make informed decisions about your health and navigate the health care system.

Why is health literacy important?
The better your health literacy, the better you will be able to manage your health and move through the health care system. Many people need to manage their health condition or take care of someone else who has one.

Go to page 3 to find tips to improve your health literacy.

Patient’s Corner

By Flavia B.

In recognition of Health Literacy month, here is an inspirational story about a patient’s experience at University Health Network (UHN).

Approximately 8 years ago, I was leading a fast paced life, working too hard and worrying too much! Suddenly, all that worry about work did not seem so important any more, as I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Surgery, chemo and radiation therapies soon followed.

Who held my hand throughout the process? My family and friends were my biggest fans and supporters, always being there, on good days and... not so great days. There were, however, the other ‘fans and supporters’ who worked tirelessly to ensure that my journey would be, not only successful, but also as pleasant as it could be, under the circumstances. I cannot thank enough the doctors and nurses at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre for their dedication and commitment to my personal health.

I strongly believe that what often makes a world of difference to a patient is ‘how’ the message is delivered. It is the smile, the optimistic comments, the words of encouragement that have helped me remain positive and ready to win the fight. Even now, after some years have passed, I never tire to hear those promising words and I do hear them, especially from one of my specialists whom I still see. She knows how I worry before my follow ups and she always takes the time to sit with me, to explain, to encourage.
me and make me feel special. She never tires of speaking to me as if it were the first time. To her and to all the others who have and still are caring for me, I will forever be grateful. I have truly been blessed!

During my journey, I have had so many questions that needed to be answered. Questions ranged from nutrition, to statistics on survivorship, to types of treatments, just to name a few. Navigating the internet is easy but also rather frightening and dangerous if one does not know how to accurately interpret what they read.

The Patient & Family Learning Centre is one of the services that are available to all patients. I used this service over the years to ask for health information. My most recent request was assistance in understanding the pros & cons related to various medications. I tried to do some homework on my own, by searching the web; however, not having a medical background, these are the areas that I found most difficult: asking the right question that would pinpoint to the correct sites, knowing which research is legitimate and reliable, reading technical medical jargon, and understanding what the results really mean. For this reason, I decided to contact the Patient & Family Learning Centre.

I emailed my questions and was contacted by them. I was very lucky to have received the support from the Librarian, Michelle, who took the time to really understand my question and research for me. She not only sent me back a number of articles that focused on what I was interested in, she even summarized the results for me. Some of you will understand when I say that providing a synopsis of the results is the hardest part of research. The Patient & Family Learning Centre really does all the hard work for the patient. What would take hours and days trying to sort out, they will provide to you in black and white. Not only that, on my own, I would never really have been satisfied that I had found the correct answer; there would always have been doubts. This Centre has helped bring some sanity and clarity to some very important questions and, with that, have brought peace of mind!

There are other services offered by UHN that I found very helpful: the Lymphedema educational program managed by very caring therapists from Cancer Rehab and Survivorship Program.

At ELLICSR Health, Wellness, and Cancer Survivorship Centre, I attended the Exercise Program and some lunch discussions on specific topics. I also attended Look Good/Feel Better program. This program was very educational and fun. I still remember one nurse saying to me: “Just because you are sick, it does not mean that you should not look pretty”.

To all patients dealing with a difficult health problem I would say that you are not alone. It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a village to help you through your journey. At Princess Margaret, you have your village, from doctors to nurses, from make-up artists to researchers and Librarians, from spiritual counselors to mental health therapists. They are ‘your’ team and they will support you, as much as you need them!

Below are the contacts for the programs and services mentioned by Flavia B.

**Lymphedema Program**
Cancer Rehab and Survivorship Program
2nd Floor beside the Breast Centre
Phone: 416 946 4501, ext 2363
Email: Survivorship@uhn.ca

**ELLICSR: Health, Wellness & Cancer Survivorship Centre**
Toronto General Hospital, Basement
Phone: 416 581 8620
Email: Survivorship@uhn.ca

**Look Good Feel Better Program**
Find a workshop near you and register online at lgfb.ca
Phone: 1 800 914 5665
Tips to improve your health literacy

When you visit your health care provider:

• Bring your questions so you can remember everything. Write down what your provider tells you.
• Bring all of your medicines, including vitamins and any over-the-counter or herbal remedies.
• Bring a family member or trusted friend along to help you remember what your health care provider says.
• Ask questions if you do not understand. Ask your health care provider to repeat using everyday language.
• Repeat the health information you receive in your own words.
• Ask your health care team for an interpreter if you prefer to communicate with your health care provider in a language other than English.
• Ask your health care provider about signing up for myUHN Patient Portal where you can see your health record and appointment information.

Adapted from the Health Literacy: Why is it important for me? brochure by UHN Patient and Family Education Program

Other Patient & Family Education resources:

1. UHN Patient Education Videos: www.youtube.com/UHNPatientEducation

2. Health and Wellness Mobile Apps: get your copy at a Patient & Family Learning Centre. The list is available in English, Chinese and Multilingual.

   • Health Literacy
   • How to Protect Your Health Info Online
   • Using the Internet to Find Health Information
   • Partnering in Care: meeting with the healthcare team

Contact us

Our Patient & Family Learning Centres are located in the lobbies of the following UHN sites.

Princess Margaret
416 946 4501 ext. 5383
patienteducation@uhn.ca

Toronto General
416 340 4800 ext. 5951
tgpen@uhn.ca

Toronto Western
416 603 6277
twpfl@uhn.ca

Monthly Talk

September: Arthritis
Date: Friday, September 27, 2019
Time: 1:00 – 2:30 pm

October: Managing your medications
Date: Friday, October 25, 2019
Time: 1:00 – 2:30 pm

Location: Toronto Western Hospital, Auditorium, West Wing, 2nd Floor, 399 Bathurst Street

To register, call 416 603 6475 or email Evangeline.Roldan@uhn.ca
Spectrum Health Care offers a range of customized services to help you at every step of your recovery.

▶ Patient Transportation
- Wheelchair and stretcher transportation to and from the hospital
- Transportation to rehab, medical imaging and other care facilities
- Dialysis transfers

▶ Home Health Care
- Personal support workers to help with recovery at home
- Post-surgery and wound care nursing services
- Escorts to medical appointments and errands
- In-home foot care

▶ Senior Care
- Hospital bedside companion
- Friendly drop-in visits at home
- Live-in assistance and overnight services
- Driver assistance for appointments & errands
- House cleaning