

## Educational support materials for ABIM's *Care for the Underserved* Module

### Module #8

This patient appears to be adherent with his oral medications, as evidenced by improvement in hypertension, dyslipidemia, and bronchitis; however, he is not achieving the same level of success with his diabetes regimen. This could be a sign that the patient has difficulty making the appropriate adjustments to his insulin dosing. His insulin regimen requires that he be able to test his blood sugar, read and interpret the results, and adjust the insulin dose accordingly. His poor glycemic control could be the result of limited literacy or numeracy.<sup>1</sup> Questions such as "how would you rate your ability to read" (excellent, good, okay, poor, terrible); and "how often do you need to have someone help you when you read instructions, pamphlets, or other written material from your doctor or pharmacy" (never, rarely sometimes, often, always) when incorporated into routine patient questionnaires can help to identify patients who have poor health literacy.<sup>2</sup> The worse a person rates their reading ability or the more they need help with written materials, the greater the chance that they have poor health literacy on a standardized health literacy test.

Assessing the patient's recall and comprehension about how to use his insulin might help him gain better glucose control.<sup>3</sup> In addition disease management support with materials aimed at low health literacy patients has been shown to improve glucose control in patients with low health literacy.<sup>4-6</sup> However, these programs may have to be ongoing to see sustained effects.

*For further information, see the following:*

1. Schillinger D, Piette J, Grumbach K, et al: Closing the loop: Physician communication with diabetic patients who have low health literacy. *Arch Intern Med* 2003;163:83-90.
2. Jeppesen KM, Coyle JD, Miser WF. Screening Questions to Predict Limited Health Literacy: A Cross-Sectional Study of Patients With Diabetes Mellitus. *Ann Fam Med* 2009;7:24-31
3. Schillinger D, Grumbach K, Piette J, et al: Association of health literacy with diabetes outcomes. *JAMA* 2002;288:475-482.
4. Schillinger D, Handley M, Wang F, Hammer H. Effects of self-management support among vulnerable patients with diabetes: a three-arm practical clinical trial. *Diabetes Care*. 2009 Apr;32(4):559-66
5. Rothman RL, DeWalt DA, Malone R, et al. Influence of Patient Literacy on the Effectiveness of a Primary Care-Based Diabetes Disease Management Program. *JAMA* 2004;292:1711-6

Cavanaugh K, Wallston KA, Gebretsadik T, et al. Addressing Literacy and Numeracy to Improve Diabetes Care. *Diabetes Care* 2009;32:2149-55

*This educational support material was created by the Society of General Internal Medicine's Disparities Task Force. For more information, visit [www.sгим.org/go/disparities](http://www.sгим.org/go/disparities)*