



# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **How to Talk to Your Doctor**

Lisa Washburn, DrPH, Associate Professor - Health

### **Background Information**

- Only 12 percent of adults have proficient health literacy. Nearly 9 out of 10 adults may lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease.
- Low health literacy has been linked to poor health outcomes, higher rates of hospitalization and use of the emergency department, less frequent use of preventive services like screenings and immunizations and increased costs.

Anyone can have low health literacy, and you can't tell just by looking at someone. It is best to make all of our communications clear and easy to understand.

### **Target Audience**

- EHC leaders and members
- Adult audiences

### **Objectives**

- Participants will increase confidence in filling out medical forms.
- Participants will increase confidence in communicating with healthcare providers.
- Participants will increase confidence in taking medicines as prescribed.

### **Materials**

Agent orders from state office (at least three weeks in advance of lesson):

- **How to Talk to Your Doctor HANDbOOK** (order from state office; 1 copy per participant)
- **Med HANDbag** (order from state office; 1 per participant)

Make copies of:

- **Pre- and Post-Class Questions** (1 copy per participant)
- **Sign-in Slip** (1 per participant; copy 2 per page – cut in half)
- **Informed Consent** handout (2 copies per participant; one to sign and return, the other to keep)
- **Group Session Report and Checklist** (complete and return following session)

## Note:

- This lesson is taught using the **How to Talk to Your Doctor HANDBOOK**. This small booklet is the focus. No PowerPoint slides are needed for this lesson.
- A How to Talk to Your Doctor train-the-trainer video is available for viewing through <http://courses.uaex.edu>. See **Instructions for Accessing Courses** site document. You will need to create an account and sign up for the How to Talk to Your Doctor course. This course will prepare you to teach the program in your community.

**Teaching Tip:** *As you lead the class, stress using fingers to remember the steps instead of focusing on just reading the HANDBOOK.*

**Teaching Tip:** *Pass out the materials in the order that you need them, making sure to pass out the **Post-Class Questions** at the end of the training session. Do not refer to the Pre-Class or Post-Class Questions as tests. Read the **Pre-Class Questions** out loud as participants mark their answers. Read the questions exactly as written, including the answer choices. Have participants select the answer that best reflects how they feel about the question. Remind them there is no right or wrong answer. Take up the Pre-Class Questions when participants complete it.*

## Introduction

One of the most important parts of good healthcare is being able to talk to your doctor. Having a plan can help you remember questions you may have as well as answers to questions the doctor may ask. This HANDBOOK will help you make a plan for talking with your doctor.

**Pass out the Dear Participant letter.** Each participant should receive two copies. Review the participant letter. Ask participants to sign one copy if they agree to be included in the research study. Collect signed copies.

**Pass out the Participant Sign-in Slip.** Review parts of the slip and ask participants to complete. Collect completed sign-in slips. Ask a helper to review the slips to make sure contact information is legible.

**Pass out Pre-Class Questions.** Tell participants there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Read through each question. Tell participants to circle the number choice that best fits how he or she feels about the question. **Take up Pre-Class Questions when everyone is finished.**

Tell participants they will answer Post-Class Questions just like this at the end of the session today to see if their thoughts have changed.

**Say:** To prepare for your next doctor's office visit, we will:

- Go over everything needed.
- Learn the 5 steps to talking to your doctor. How many fingers are on a hand? This is why we call this a HANDBOOK.
- Use your own hand to remember the 5 steps.

- Fill out the blank side of each page with notes to help you remember what's important. If you are like me, sometimes I need to jot down notes or I might forget something when I go in to see the doctor.
- Finally, take this HANDBOOK with you to your next doctor's office visit.

**Ask:** What questions do you have before we get started? What do you hope to get out of this today? Anyone want to share any personal experiences they have had communicating with their doctor, good or bad?

### **Step One (HANDBOOK, pages 4 and 5)**

**Say:** Everyone hold up your index finger. The first step is to **remember**. Either picture tying a ribbon around your finger to help you remember or point to your head.

Remember to bring the things you need to your doctor – things that you may need to read, hear or talk to your doctor. You will probably need your insurance card and an ID card like a driver's license. Maybe you will need your glasses to be able to see well, or maybe hearing aids to be able to hear all that your doctor is saying. You might need to bring someone with you to help with the forms, answering questions and listening to the doctor. You may need your calendar or schedule so you will know when you can come back for appointments. Bring this book with you too because after we finish going through it today, you will have lots of good information in here you need to take to your doctor. We will talk more about bringing a bag with all of your meds later.

So Step 1 is to remember! Remember to bring all the things you might need.

Let's now check what you will need to remember for your visit. If you will need something not listed, check "other" and write down notes to help you remember those things. You can abbreviate words and just write enough so you can tell what you are talking about.

**Teaching Tip:** *Give participants time to complete; walk around to answer any questions.*

**Closure:** Let's review. What is Step 1? (Hold up your index finger and point to your head.)  
**Remember to bring all the things you might need.**

### **Step Two (HANDBOOK, pages 6 and 7)**

**Say:** Everyone hold up 2 fingers. The second step is a "**two-minute history**."

For your doctor to figure out what is wrong and know how to best treat you, they will need some information. This is called your "history."

You need to share a short list of your most important health problems, the reason you are at the visit, when your recent problem started and what you want out of the visit. Be sure you tell any symptoms you are having and how often it happens. We will talk more later about medicines you take, but include this in your history, especially if it is related to the reason you are visiting the doctor.

You should be able to share all of this information in 2 minutes or less. This is one of the things to write down so you don't forget something important.

**Ask:** Have you ever gone to the doctor and once you got home realized you forgot to tell them something?

It is important to write down key words to help you remember all you want to tell your doctor. Look at page 7 where there is space to jot down notes for your 2-minute history. I am going to give you an example of a 2-minute history where I tell the doctor all the important things about my health and why I am there for a visit. After I share this example, we will go over these questions and talk about what I could write down for my visit.

*Give an example of a 2-minute history. The examples below include common conditions and use numbers.*

**Example 1:** I found out I had Type 2 diabetes about 3 months ago. I started a diet and have been taking pills for it since then. I have lost about 25 pounds and my blood sugar readings have gone down more and more each month. When I was told I had diabetes, I also found out my blood pressure was a little high, but the doctor wanted me just to watch what I ate and start exercising.

I am at this visit today because I need to get my blood work done to check on my diabetes. The doctor had said if I lost weight that I might be able to stop taking the pills for it. Also, I need to get my blood pressure checked. The doctor had said if I watched what I ate and exercised, it would probably get better, but if it didn't, I would need to start medicine for high blood pressure.

**Example 2:** I have Type 2 diabetes and have been taking pills for it for about a year. My blood sugar readings have been going up lately, especially when I had a bad cold last week. In the mornings when I get up, my blood sugar has been around 105. Then when I check it 2 hours after eating, it has been about 130. Also I take medicine for high blood pressure. It had been better since I started medicine about 6 months ago, but for the past 2 weeks, it has been higher. It's been running about 145/92.

I'm here today because I am worried about my blood sugar being high and my blood pressure going up. I don't want to take more medicine but know bad things can happen if I don't get my blood sugar and blood pressure down. I hope you can help me.

**Say:** Notice how I used some numbers? Doctors often need to know things like how high your fever has been or what your blood pressure has been running lately if that is why you are there. Those numbers are something you should write down. We often forget information like that when we are in with our doctor. Look at the page for notes on our 2-minute history.

**Ask:** What were my important health problems? Why was I at the visit? When did my recent problems start? What did I want out of the visit? (*Allow participants to answer. Allow discussion.*)

Now it's your turn. Write down a word or two to help you remember each of these important things. You may not have a doctor's office visit coming up soon. If not, you can think about your last visit or think about what you most often go to the doctor for. For today, write down things you are willing to share with others in the room. Write down key words to help you remember what to say.

**Teaching Tip:** *Give participants time to complete; walk around to answer any questions.*

**Activity:** Now that everyone has written down some key words to help them remember what to say, let's practice telling our doctor our 2-minute history. Everyone find a partner, someone sitting by you. Introduce yourself if you do not already know one another. Decide who will go first. I am going to set the timer for 2 minutes. You will have 2 minutes to give your history. You can use your notes. If you finish early, just wait for the rest of us. Then I will reset the timer and the other partner can tell their 2-minute history. What questions do you have about what we are about to do? *(Pause, answer any questions.)*

*Give participants about 1 minute to find a partner and introduce themselves. Then set the timer for 2 minutes. Let the first one practice. Reset the timer for 2 minutes. Let the second one practice.*

**Closure:** How did it go? Was it easy or difficult to give your 2-minute history? *(Allow discussion.)* Let's review. What is Step 2? *(Hold up 2 fingers.)* The second step is to **give a 2-minute history**.

### Step Three (HANDbook, pages 8 and 9)

**Say:** Everyone hold up these 3 fingers. What letter does this look like? Yes, a W. That stands for WORDS.

The third step is to **repeat back instructions and information in your own WORDS**.

Sometimes we listen very carefully to what doctors tell us, but doctors aren't always clear. Sometimes they give us too much information. If we say it back in our own WORDS, it helps both us and our doctors know we are going home knowing what to do. Repeating information also helps us remember. There are a few examples in your book of what you could say:

- So here's how I understood you...
- So when I go home I will...
- You just told me a lot of information. Let me be sure I got all of it...

**Ask:** Can you think of any other ways you might want to start this conversation with your doctor so you can repeat instructions and information in your own WORDS? *(Let audience share.)*

**Ask:** When should you repeat back instructions and information in your own WORDS? *(Let audience share.)* Anytime your doctor or nurse gives you instructions or information, especially anything that requires you to take actions. This might be before your doctor leaves the

exam room if your doctor gives you instructions. It could be at the end of your visit when the nurse explains to you how to take your medicines.

On the next page (page 9), check one of the boxes for how you will start this conversation with your doctor or check “other” and write your own.

**Ask:** Can someone tell me in their own WORDS what we are supposed to do now? (*Let audience share.*) Good job!

**Teaching Tip:** *Give participants time to complete; walk around to answer any questions.*

**Closure:** Let’s review. What is Step 3? (*Hold up 3 fingers.*) The third step is to **repeat back instructions and information in your own WORDS.**

### **Step Four (HANDbOOK, pages 10 and 11)**

**Say:** Everyone hold up 4 fingers. Step 4 is **don’t FORget to fill out your FORMs completely.**

I don’t think I have ever gone to the doctor without having to fill out some kind of form. Sometimes the forms can be hard to fill out. You may need information you don’t remember just off the top of your head.

- Ask for help if the forms are hard to fill out.
- Take a list of things that may be on the form.

Usually, forms will ask about problems you have had in the past or surgeries you have had. They often want dates too. That’s something most of us can’t remember without thinking about it and writing it down.

You often need to write down other doctors or clinics you visit. They may want the phone number or address for those other doctors or clinics. I would not know information like that from memory and would need to have that written down.

Forms almost always have a place for your insurance information. We listed insurance cards as something to remember in Step 1. You might have more than one insurance card and may need to have the policy numbers, addresses and phone numbers from them.

We also mentioned calendars or schedules in Step 1. Forms sometimes will need information about when you are available for future appointments or when you have transportation. Maybe you have a schedule of when you go to physical therapy each week or when you go to a counselor. Maybe you go to an exercise class the same days and times each week. You may need that information so your next doctor’s office visit doesn’t conflict with something you already have planned.

On the next page, write down information for forms you think you may need on your next visit. You might not have some of the specific information with you. For example, you might know you had a knee replacement surgery but need to look up exactly when you had it. For now,

you can just write down “knee” to remind you. Or, if you see an eye doctor for glaucoma and know his name is Dr. Jones but don’t know the address or phone number of the clinic, just write down “Dr. Jones eye doctor” for now. When you get home, you can look up the address and phone number and add to this sheet if you have it.

*Participants might find it difficult to think of what they need to write down. Be prepared to provide suggestions. Walk around and assist as needed. When you start Step 5, pass out the Med HANDBags if you have been provided with them.*

**Closure:** Let’s review. What is Step 4? (*Hold up 4 fingers.*) The fourth step is **don’t FORget to fill out your FORms completely.**

### **Step Five (HANDBook, pages 12 and 13)**

**Say:** Everyone hold out your entire hand, all 5 fingers, and turn over your hand, open palm.

Step 5 is **take your meds and take your meds!**

It might sound like I just repeated myself, but when my hand is out like this with all 5 fingers and open palm, I am reminded of having my meds in my hand. The first “take your meds” means just that, take your meds like the label says to. The second “take your meds” means take all of your meds with you to your doctor’s office visit.

This is one of the most important things you can do! Take a bag of all prescription medicines, over-the-counter ones and even vitamins and herbal supplements to your visit. Your doctor needs to make sure it is safe to take all of them together.

The next page (page 13) has a chart for you to fill out and take with you. It includes the medicine you take, a description of what it looks like, the purpose for taking it (that means the reason you take it), the dosage (that means how much you take) and when you take it. An example might be:

Omeprazole, pink/red capsule, acid reflux, 10 mg, once a day in the morning

Some may only take a couple of medicines and can fill this chart out fairly quickly. Others might be on lots of medicines, and it will take quite a while to fill this out. But it is worth the time because your doctor will need to know this information to be able to give you the best care.

We are going to take a few minutes to start your med charts. Most of you will need to finish it at home when you have your medicines with you to look at the labels and the medicines.

**Teaching Tip:** *Walk around to answer any questions. Allow just a couple of minutes here. Most participants will need to fill this out at home when they have all of their meds to look at.*

**Closure:** Let’s review. What is Step 5? (*Hold up 5 fingers.*) The fifth step is **take your meds and take your meds!**

## Review and Wrap-Up

We have now gone over all 5 steps of how to talk to your doctor. Let's review them together using our hands.

**Step 1: Remember** – (*Point to your head.*) Remember to bring the things you need to your doctor – things that you may need to read, hear or talk to your doctor.

**Step 2: Two-minute history** – Give your doctor a 2-minute history of your most important health problems and what you are there for.

**Step 3: Words** – Repeat back instructions and information in your own WORDS.

**Step 4: FORMs** – Don't FORget to fill out your FORMs completely.

**Step 5: Take your meds** – Take your medicine as labeled and take all your medicine with you to the visit.

When you get home, go back over this HANDBOOK and add any more information you need, like writing down all of your medicines or important phone numbers or dates. Take this HANDBOOK and a bag with all of your medicine with you to your next doctor's office visit. Use the 5 steps to help you talk to your doctor.

The very last thing we need to do is to answer our **Post-Class Questions**. It will work just like our **Pre-Class Questions**.

*(Pass out Post-Class Questions. Read each question and answer choice aloud.)*

Please write your name at the top. Please circle the answer that best fits how you now feel after our class. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. I will take these up just like I did the Pre-Class Questions.

## Acknowledgement

Leader Training Guide content was adapted from the How to Talk to Your Doctor Facilitator Training developed by Tina Moore, M.Ed., Ed.S., Director of Center for Health Literacy Programs and Training, UAMS Center for Health Literacy.

Special thanks to Millie Collins, Pam Pruetz, and Dianna Bowen for their review of lesson content.

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2015-46100-2423.