

1-28-2014

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Michelle L. Eberle

*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Margot Malachowski

*Baystate Medical Center*

Alberta Richetelle

*University of Connecticut Health Center*

*See next page for additional authors*

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## Repository Citation

Eberle, Michelle L.; Malachowski, Margot; Richetelle, Alberta; Lahoz, Monina; McIntosh, Linda; Moore, Bradley; Searl, Jen; and Kronick, Judy, "Clear: Conversations: A Collaborative Regional Project to Help Patients Improve their Health Visits" (2014). *National Network of Libraries of Medicine New England Region (NNLM NER) Repository*. 25.

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# Clear: Conversations: A Collaborative Regional Project to Help Patients Improve their Health Visits

## **Authors**

Michelle L. Eberle, Margot Malachowski, Alberta Richetelle, Monina Lahoz, Linda McIntosh, Bradley Moore, Jen Searl, and Judy Kronick

## **Keywords**

Health Literacy, Clear Conversations, Health Literacy Missouri

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*Clear: Conversations:*  
**A Collaborative Regional Project to Help Patients Improve their Health Visits**

AUTHORS' AFFILIATIONS

- Michelle Eberle, MSLIS, [michelle.eberle@umassmed.edu](mailto:michelle.eberle@umassmed.edu), Consumer Health Information Coordinator, National Network of Libraries of Medicine, New England Region
- Margot Malachowski, MLS, [margot.malachowski@baystatehealth.org](mailto:margot.malachowski@baystatehealth.org), Outreach Librarian, Baystate Medical Center
- Alberta Richetelle, MLS, MPH, [richetelle@uchc.edu](mailto:richetelle@uchc.edu), Program Director, Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network, the University of Connecticut Health Center Library's consumer health program
- Monina Lahoz, PhD, [monina.lahoz@mcphs.edu](mailto:monina.lahoz@mcphs.edu), Associate Professor of Pharmacy Administration, MCPHS University;
- Linda McIntosh, [lmcintosh@comcast.net](mailto:lmcintosh@comcast.net), EdM, RN
- Bradley Moore, MPH, [bmoore@bphc.org](mailto:bmoore@bphc.org), Boston Public Health Commission
- Jen Searl, MLS, [jsearl@partners.org](mailto:jsearl@partners.org), Health Education Project Specialist, Maxwell & Eleanor Blum Patient and Family Learning Center.
- Judith Kronick, MLS, [kronick@uchc.edu](mailto:kronick@uchc.edu), Reference Librarian, Healthnet: Connecticut Consumer Health Information Network, the University of Connecticut Health Center Library's consumer health program

**Report submitted: January 2014**

Funded under contract HHS-N-276-2011-00010C with the University of Massachusetts Medical School and awarded by the DHHS, NIH, National Library of Medicine.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2011, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, New England Region (NN/LM NER) formed five Communities of Interest (COI) to support the professional development needs of New England librarians. As part of this initiative, the Health Literacy COI was formed<sup>i</sup>. The newly formed COI was led by a hospital librarian from the Western Connecticut Health Network. She attended the Institute for Healthcare Advancement's Health Literacy Conference, where she learned about the ***Straight Talk with your Doc*** program from Health Literacy Missouri. In the first year, the Health Literacy COI offered a series of webinars that included an Introduction to Health Literacy, Highlights from the Institute for HealthCare Advancement's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Health Literacy Conference, 10 Ways Your Library Can Contribute to Health Literacy, and a MedlinePlus Train-the-Trainer. For the second year of the COI, an outreach librarian at a teaching hospital in western Massachusetts led the Health Literacy COI's ***Clear: Conversations*** project. The Health Literacy Community of Interest was facilitated the NER's Consumer Health Information Coordinator.

In the fall of 2011, some Health Literacy COI members attended the ***Straight Talk with Your Doc*** webinar sponsored by Health Literacy Missouri. The New England Region conducted focus groups, in 2012, with network members to evaluate the progress of new initiatives. The focus groups identified a desire for small group projects with hands-on experience. The NN/LM NER decided to coordinate a ***Straight Talk with Your Doc*** collaborative regional project with Network Members to help patients improve their health visits.

***Straight Talk with Your Doc*** was a workshop aimed at teaching participants health literacy skills to help them communicate with their health care providers including how to: ask for simple language, slow down

the provider, use teach-back, get need-to-know information, and bring medications/supplements for a brown bag review.<sup>ii</sup> The highlight of the program was role-playing of a health care visit. The role-play featured a health visit interaction between a mock or real health professional actor and a volunteer patient. The *Straight Talk with Your Doc* program peaked NER's interest. NER approached Health Literacy Missouri about using its materials to conduct a Health Literacy COI regional project. When materials were received, NER learned that the *Straight Talk with Your Doc* was updated with the new title, *Clear: Conversations*<sup>iii</sup>. The program materials included a training guide for conducting the workshop and workshop materials: checklists, role-play cases, materials for training (e.g., pre- and post-workshop tests), and health literacy resources and readings. The *Clear: Conversations* materials provided a library of role-play cases on asthma, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Participants observed the role play and shared their thoughts on how to improve the health care visit experience. After obtaining an affirmative answer from Health Literacy Missouri, NER's Health Literacy COI invited its members to submit an application to take part in a collaborative regional project. Five organizations were awarded with *Clear: Conversations* materials: the Boston Public Health Commission; a Boston area Registered Nurse; MCPHS University; the Massachusetts General Hospital Blum Patient and Family Learning Center; and Healthnet, the University of Connecticut Health Center Library's consumer health program. This article describes the conduct and results of the Health Literacy COI collaborative regional project.

## **METHODS**

The five *Clear: Conversations* awardees, the COI Leader, and the COI's Facilitator met via teleconference in August 2012 to review Health Literacy Missouri's materials. The group found the materials helpful but decided to customize the pre- and post-workshop tests. The NN/LM's Outreach Evaluation Resource Center met with the group regularly via conference call to help with the updates. The group met regularly via teleconference where the five awardees shared their progress and experiences, and provided support during the planning and implementation stages of their workshops.

## OUTCOMES

The *Clear: Conversations* workshops were offered at a variety of venues in New England including the Boston Healthy Start Initiative (Massachusetts), the Brookline Senior Center (Massachusetts), the Natick Senior Center (Massachusetts), the Maxwell and Eleanor Blum Patient and Family Learning Center (Massachusetts), and the Family Life Education Center (Connecticut). Awardees adapted the *Clear: Conversations* program to better meet the needs of their own audiences. For example, one of them prepared a slide presentation, and reformatted the pre- and post-workshop evaluation forms to enhance their readability for older adults.

Some events attracted a large number of participants; others were more intimate. Fifty-nine participants completed the pre-workshop test while 44 completed the post-workshop test. At one workshop attended by 50 participants, the pre- and post-workshop tests were not administered. Of 59 participants completing the pre-test, the following percentage responded “yes” when asked:

When you left the doctor’s office did you:

- Feel you and your doctor truly understood each other: 71%
- Feel satisfied with the conversation you had with your doctor: 66%
- Feel you knew two to three important things to do to take care of your health: 75%
- Wish you had asked more questions: 59%

Of 44 participants completing post-tests, the following percentage responded that the workshop improved their comfort level to:

- Have a list of questions to ask your doctor: 95%
- Ask questions: 98%
- Feel comfortable asking questions: 95%
- Ask your doctor to slow down when he/she was speaking too fast: 91%

- Ask your doctor to repeat something you did not understand: 95%
- Ask your doctor to use words you can understand: 88%
- Repeat back what you think the doctor said to make sure you understood: 90%
- Bring your prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, and supplements you regularly take to explain to your doctor how you took each medicine: 90%

Twenty four participants shared a specific action they would take as a result of the workshop. They said they would:

- “Ask my doctor to explain medical terms I do not understand and to use words I understand.”
- “Make a list and prioritize it.”
- “Go prepared. Make sure I’m given enough time. Make sure I have adequate follow up.”
- “Voy a preguntar mas acerca de los que no entienda. (I am going to ask more about what I don’t understand.)”
- “Repeat back what the doctor said to make sure I understood it. Be more assertive with questions to ask the doctor.”
- “Have a better relationship with doctor.”

At all events, the role play with the health care provider actor was identified as a peak experience.

Awardees found it most challenging to find someone to play the health care provider actor role. The role was filled by a mix of professionals including a Doctor of Pharmacy candidate, a third year medical student, and a retired physician. The health care provider actors were asked to reflect on their experience. They found it to be meaningful and also expressed how it will make a difference in how they provide care and talk with their patients in the future.

## DISCUSSION

NN/LM NER's *Clear: Conversations* project provided the opportunity for collaboration between a cross-disciplinary group of health information providers, including librarians, public health staff, a professor and a nurse. Several of the project leaders have continued to offer the program in their communities. Together, the group cultivated their health literacy training skills and empowered patients and families with tools and skills to create better health care visits. The Clear: Conversations materials created by Health Literacy Missouri present an opportunity for librarians and other health information providers to empower patients with useful and essential health literacy skills.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thank you to Health Literacy Missouri for creating the *Clear: Conversations* program, which was at the heart of this program.

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