

## Literacy and Health Report

by Charles Moody



**LPM President Mary Switek, Chris McInnis, and Health Minister the Honourable Tim Sale chat at the Literacy and Health conference**

In this project funded by The Winnipeg Foundation, our aim was to help people with low literacy skills gain better access to the health care system. Poorly educated adults lack knowledge about health and lack confidence in the system. Health educators often try to reach these people with written material that they can't read. We wanted to break down barriers on both sides.

This was a sequel to our 2003 Health Canada project, "Literacy and Health: Defining Links and Developing Partnerships". On that occasion we brought literacy and health workers together in workshops. Now we wanted to give them resources to use.

### Going to the Doctor

We produced a booklet and guide for instructors to use in their classroom. Simple lessons showed how to handle all the issues associated with going to the doctor. Three hundred copies have been printed, and are currently being tested before a revised version is printed.

### Patient Prompt Card

All of us have difficulty at the doctor's remembering the questions to ask and understanding the answers given. How much more difficult is this experience for people with low literacy skills! We designed a wallet-sized folding card containing useful medical information and reminders to prompt inexperienced patients.

### Literacy Card for Health Workers

Some health providers are still unaware that some of their clients have low literacy skills. One public health nurse confessed at a workshop that she had just realized that some of her clients weren't reading the material she was leaving behind during her visits. In response to a request from a public health nurse, we developed a resource that would help health care providers and others communicate with low literacy clients.

### Plain Language Revision

Plain language is not a cure-all for overcoming the barrier to reaching patients with low literacy skills. In a study at Montreal General Hospital, these patients with low literacy skills were asked how they wanted to receive their health information. They replied – in one-to-one verbal communication. In fact, many adults do not read at all.

However, there is no doubt that receiving material in plain language makes it easy for many adults with low literacy skills to understand. And, of course, material written in plain language is easier for *everybody* to understand!

To this end, we helped Klinik and the Sexuality Education Resource Centre make their website more accessible to low literacy clients by revising 25 of their web documents in plain language.

### Virtual Trunks

We created an actual kit of plain language health resources for literacy instructors, but the other resources were on the web – as virtual trunks.

We assembled a virtual trunk of resources on nutrition for literacy instructors. These PDF files can be downloaded from our website.

We also developed an annotated bibliography of web resources in plain language for health care providers.

These resources are available at our office or on our website at <http://www.mb.literacy.ca/virtualtrunks.htm>