



A guide to becoming a Crystal Clear **General Practice**





Contents

Introduction	4
What is a health literacy friendly service?	5
Why become a health literacy friendly general practice?	6
How to become health literacy friendly	7
Crystal Clear general practice quality standards	8
How to become a Crystal Clear General Practice and achieve the Crystal Clear Mark	10
How to guides	13
1 How to develop a literacy friendly policy	14
2 How to help patients find and use important information and instructions	15
3 How to use plain English when speaking and writing	16
4 How to check for understanding: Using teach-back	20
5 How to improve the layout of your general practice	21
6 How to improve staff awareness of health literacy	22
7 How to evaluate and improve your service	24

Health literacy and numeracy has two elements: the health provider communicates clearly and the patient understands correctly. They are essential to delivering effective health services.

Recent OECD research¹ shows that one in six adults in Ireland (521,550 people) find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions. One in four (754,000 adults) has difficulties with real world maths, from basic addition and subtraction to calculating averages.

The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP), MSD and NALA have developed the national Crystal Clear General Practice (GP) programme with a unique quality mark. The programme will recognise general practices that deliver a health literacy friendly service to their patients, by awarding them the **Crystal Clear Mark**. A service that is health literacy friendly takes account of the literacy and numeracy needs of its patients and regularly evaluates and consistently improves this.



¹ Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012 Survey Results for Ireland: CSO, Dublin

What is a health literacy friendly service?

Many health services are looking at how they engage with their patients, particularly those patients who have difficulty reading and understanding health information. In everyday terms, a health literacy friendly organisation enables everyone to:

- **access its services;**
- **communicate effectively with it, in different ways;**
- **take part in processes and follow procedures; and**
- **be treated fairly regardless of their health literacy and numeracy needs.**



Why become a health literacy friendly general practice?

It's good for the public

Irish research found **one in five people** are not fully confident that they understand the information they receive from their healthcare professional (HCP). Are your patients fully aware of and accessing your services? Do they understand what they need to know?

The first step in improving your services is being aware of this and what you can do about it.

It's good for your service

Taking the time to become more health literacy friendly and get the Crystal Clear Mark shows that you are committed to providing the best possible GP service. You will be able to offer your patients a better service which will result in higher satisfaction levels. You can display the Crystal Clear Mark in your general practice – we will give you a framed certificate and a sticker for your door or window.

It's good for the development of your staff

Completing the Crystal Clear audit, applying the learnings in your practice and completing the ICGP eLearning module on health literacy will all be recognised as suitable for CPD credits which can be recorded on the ICGP ePortfolio. Audit for audit credits; application and documentation of application for internal credits and completion of eLearning module for external credits.

It's good for the wider health agenda

You will enhance your reputation as a high quality service and your general practice will stand out from others in your community. Your colleagues and patients will notice the work you are doing to get the **Crystal Clear Mark**. You will be working as part of Healthy Ireland to achieve better health results. Healthy Ireland is the Government's national framework for action to improve health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Its main focus is on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer.

How to become health literacy friendly

The first step in improving your service is being aware of the literacy and numeracy challenges that some of your patients face. The next steps involve you doing what you can to make it easier for all patients to use your general practice by looking at your environment and communications. To do this, you can use the audit tool developed by NALA. This online tool will help you to identify what you already do to support the literacy and numeracy needs of your patients and what you could do better. The audit is available online at www.nala.ie/crystalclear



Crystal Clear general practice quality standards

There are **nine quality standards** that a general practice must follow to become a Crystal Clear General Practice. These are:

Policies and procedures

- 1 We have a **literacy friendly policy** in place.
- 2 We have **specific procedures** to help patients find and use the important information and instructions.



Communications

- 3 Our staff use **plain English**² when **speaking** with patients.
- 4 We use **plain English** in our **written information** such as letters and notices.
- 5 We **check** that patients **understand** what we have told them.
- 6 The **layout** of our general practice is clear.



² Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps all of us understand it the first time we read or hear it.

Staff awareness

- 7 All our staff are **aware** of literacy friendly work practices.
- 8 Our staff can **respond sensitively** to the literacy and numeracy needs of our patients.



Evaluating and improving

- 9 We regularly **evaluate** and continually **improve** our literacy friendly service.



Resources

At the end of this booklet there are a number of 'How to' guides to help you become a Crystal Clear General Practice. You can also visit www.icgp-education.ie and take the eLearning module on health literacy.

How to become a Crystal Clear General Practice and achieve the Crystal Clear Mark

To become a Crystal Clear General Practice, there are a number of steps you must take:

- 1 Go to www.nala.ie/crystalclear and complete the online audit. This involves answering nine questions on:
 - your policies and procedures;
 - how you communicate;
 - staff awareness; and
 - how you evaluate and continually improve your service.

You will need to supply evidence such as photographs of clear signage, examples of clearly written letters and ways that staff communicate effectively with patients in a literacy friendly way.

- 2 If you pass the audit, you can apply for the Crystal Clear Mark. NALA will send you the mark in the form of a door sticker and certificate which you can display in your general practice. You can also mention it on your website. We will also advise you on how to promote your achievement in the local media.

- 3 If you do not pass the audit, NALA will send you a list of actions that you can follow to help you pass the audit the next time. If you need help or advice with any of these actions, NALA will discuss this with you and offer support where possible. Once you have completed these actions, you can do the online audit again to reapply for the Crystal Clear Mark.

The audit is available online at www.nala.ie/crystalclear

Crystal Clear General Practice



Health Literacy Friendly
2015/2016



It is free to apply to the Crystal Clear General Practice Programme. When you achieve the Crystal Clear Mark, you can display it for two years.



How to guides





How to develop a literacy friendly policy

Many organisations adopt a literacy friendly policy. This policy states that they are aware of the literacy and numeracy needs of their patients and how they will take account of these needs.

Sample literacy friendly policy

We **recognise** that many adults who use our services have literacy and numeracy needs.

We **strive to be** a literacy friendly general practice by **committing to**:

- remove unnecessary literacy and numeracy related barriers to accessing and using our services;
- use plain English in our written and verbal communications;
- ensure our staff have the knowledge and skills required to deliver a literacy friendly service; and
- regularly evaluate and continually improve our literacy friendly service.

2

How to help patients find and use important information and instructions

As a GP you want to communicate in ways that all your patients understand, particularly when it comes to important information and instructions.

Here are some tips:

- **Highlight the most important information**

When you give a patient medical advice, highlight the important information that they need to act on immediately. It is useful to tell them where they can find this information in case they need to refer to it again.

- **Good 'signposting'**

It is good to tell the person what information you need to share with them today. Try to keep to a small number of points that they need to know now and tell them where they can get more information if they wish.

For example: "Take two tablets as soon as you get the prescription and then one twice a day — in the morning and the evening — after that. It will all be written on the label so you remember."

3

How to use plain English when speaking and writing

Plain English is a style of presenting information that helps someone understand it the first time they read or hear it. It helps people to access, understand and use information quickly and effectively.

When you use plain English you:

- use clear language when speaking or writing;
- give relevant information in the right order; and
- help people to understand this information quickly.



Here are some tips for using plain English when speaking:



- **Think about the language** you use when talking to patients. Use everyday words and avoid jargon. If you must use specialist or technical words, explain their meaning clearly.

For example: “Your urine result came back ‘positive’ – this means that you tested positive for (name).”

- **Limit the number of messages: tell the person the most important information**

Keep it simple. The number of messages will depend on what the patient needs to know. As a general guideline, use no more than four main messages.

- **Watch your numbers**

When you talk to patients about their health or medication, don’t assume they will understand quantitative concepts or are familiar with the measurements involved. It is best to focus on one point at a time and to offer support where you can.

- **Encourage questions**

Use open questions such as “Tell me about your problem. What may have caused it?” Try asking “What questions do you have?” instead of “Do you have any questions?”

Here are some tips for using plain English when writing:



- First put yourself in your patient's shoes
- Keep sentences short
- Avoid jargon
- Use everyday words.

For example, use 'tell' instead of 'advise'; 'fill in' instead of 'complete'; 'start' instead of 'commence'.

Have you had your flu vaccine?

The nurse is available each morning.

Free with medical card or €25.

Book now.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has developed a Writing and Design booklet. It gives tips to make your materials easier to read and understand. It is available at: www.simplyput.ie/downloads/writing_and_design_tips.pdf



Plain English Checklist

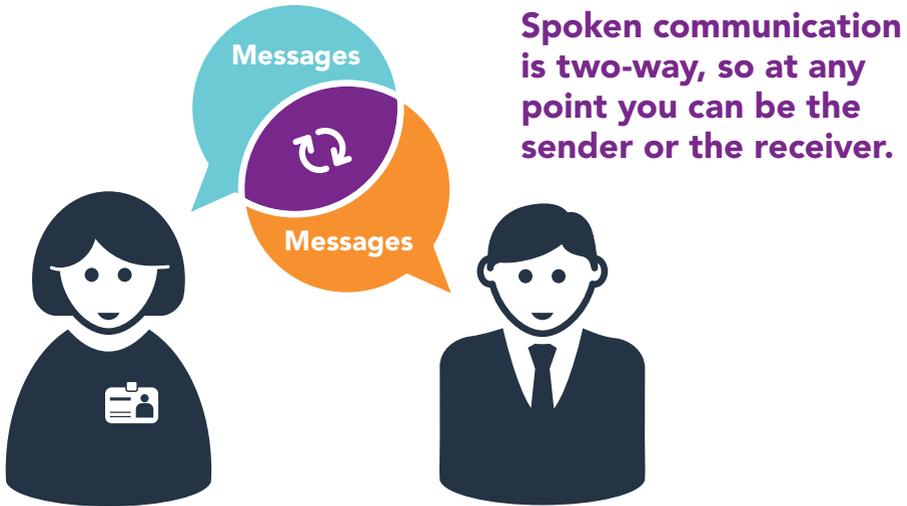


This checklist offers a quick way for you to review your written information?

	Yes	No
1 Does the written information use 'you' and 'we', where possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Does it keep technical terms and abbreviations to a minimum?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Does it use the same term for the same concept throughout?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Does it include clear instructions at the start?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Is the font size at least 12 point?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Is the font type sans serif such as Arial or Tahoma?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Is text aligned to the left?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Does it avoid underlining, groups of italics and capital letters?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4

How to check for understanding: Using teach-back



Spoken communication is two-way, so at any point you can be the sender or the receiver.

Messages can be passed between people all day, but if there is no understanding, the communication is a waste of time!

When you give a patient their health information, you should take a few minutes to find out if the patient understands the advice given, by using **teach-back**.

Teach-back is a way to assess and confirm that people understand what you have told them by asking them to repeat back the key information in their own words.

For example: “We have covered a lot about your asthma today and I want to make sure I explained it clearly. So let’s think about what we spoke about. What three things will you do when you feel an asthmatic attack coming on?”

If the patient does not understand the instructions, then you can restate or tailor the message to make it clearer.

5

How to improve the layout of your GP practice

It is important that your general practice is easy to get around. Have you considered the signs you use and their wording?

Here are some questions to review your general practice environment

Navigation Checklist



	Yes	No
1 Are specific areas of your practice clearly marked?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Do signs use a mixture of small and capital letters?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Are signs at the same height on walls so people are not looking up and down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Are colours used in signs the most visible (white, green and yellow)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Are words used to describe items consistent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 If you have a display stand for leaflets, is this clearly marked and laid out for the patients to follow easily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6

How to improve staff awareness of health literacy

Health literacy and numeracy has two elements: the health provider communicates clearly and the patient understands correctly. It is important that you and your staff are aware of and know how to respond sensitively to the literacy and numeracy needs of patients.

Know your patients

There are many reasons why people have difficulties with health information – these are not always due to difficulties with reading and writing. Other reasons include age, disability, language, culture, emotion and stress.

When talking to your patient about their health, here are some clues to help identify health literacy and numeracy issues.

Look out for:

- 1 behaviours such as returning forms incomplete, missing appointments and not complying with medical instructions;
- 2 how they respond to receiving written information, for example, “I forgot my glasses, can you tell me what’s in the booklet?”; and
- 3 their answers to questions about medication. For example, the patient does not know the name of their medicines, when they should be taking them and why.



The Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Be understanding, sensitive and non-judgemental
- Remind the person that what they say is in confidence
- Where possible, make time to be supportive
- Use plain English – when speaking and writing
- Give the person plenty of opportunity to ask questions – use the teach-back method

Don't

- use jargon
- make assumptions
- suggest someone needs to 'learn to read'
- lose patience

Raising awareness video

NALA has developed a health literacy video called 'Better health, better communication'. It is nine minutes and you can watch it at:

www.nala.ie/crystalclear



7

How to evaluate and improve your service

As part of being a Crystal Clear General Practice you should regularly evaluate and continually improve your literacy friendly service.

Here are some ways you can do this:

Build monitoring into your regular meetings

Build monitoring of your literacy friendly service into your management meetings, general staff meetings or quality assurance procedures. At these meetings put 'health literacy and numeracy' on the agenda and you can raise any issues that have come up and share how you have dealt with them. This will ensure your service is continually improving. It would be good to document any changes for your CPD portfolio and for your next audit.

Have someone responsible for monitoring

It can work well to have a staff member with specific responsibility for overseeing and driving your literacy friendly practices. This ensures that actions to improve your services happen and that other staff are aware of these improvements.



Further information

National Adult Literacy Agency

Sandford Lodge
Sandford Close
Ranelagh
Dublin 6

Telephone: +353 1 412 7900

Web: www.nala.ie



facebook.com/nalairreland



twitter.com/nalairreland



The Crystal Clear Programme is supported by MSD as part of its commitment to improving access to health.