



A guide to becoming a Crystal Clear **Pharmacy**





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Introduction

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 find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions. One in four adults struggle with real world maths, from basic addition and subtraction to calculating averages.

The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), MSD and NALA have developed the national Crystal Clear Pharmacy Programme with a unique quality mark. The programme will recognise pharmacies that deliver a literacy friendly service to their customers, by awarding them the **Crystal Clear Mark**. A service that is health literacy friendly takes account of the literacy and numeracy needs of its customers 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 literacy friendly service?

Many health services are looking at how they engage with their customers, particularly those who struggle with reading and understanding health information. In everyday terms, a 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 literacy and numeracy needs.**



Why become a literacy friendly pharmacy?

It's good for the public

Irish research found **one in ten people** has taken the wrong dose of medication because they didn't understand the instructions. Are your customers fully 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 literacy friendly and getting the Crystal Clear Mark shows that you are committed to providing the best possible pharmacy service. You will be able to offer your customers a better service which will result in higher satisfaction levels. You can display the Crystal Clear Mark in your pharmacy – we will give you a framed certificate and a sticker for your door or window. There are currently 103 pharmacies who have achieved the Mark. During the review of the process, one main benefit of applying for the Mark that was identified is that the application itself **increased daily awareness of health literacy** pharmacy practices.

It's good for the wider health agenda

You will enhance your reputation as a high quality service and your pharmacy will stand out from other pharmacies in your community. Your colleagues and customers 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 literacy friendly?

The first step in improving your service is being aware of the literacy and numeracy challenges that some of your customers face. The next steps involve you doing what you can to make it easier for all customers to use your pharmacy by looking at your environment and communications. To do this, you can use an 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 customers and what you could do better. The audit is available online at

<https://www.nala.ie/health-literacy/crystal-clear-mark/>



Crystal Clear Pharmacy

quality standards

There are **10 quality standards** that a pharmacy must follow to become a Crystal Clear Pharmacy. These are:

Communications

- 1 Our staff use **plain English** when **speaking** with people.
- 2 We can write a **medication label** in **plain English**.
- 3 We **check** that people **understand** what we have told them.
- 4 The **layout** of our pharmacy is clear.



Staff awareness and responding sensitively

- 5 Our staff are **aware** of health literacy and literacy friendly work practices.
- 6 Our staff **respond sensitively** to people with literacy and numeracy needs.



Policies and procedures

- 7 We have a **literacy friendly** policy.
- 8 We have **specific ways** to help people find and use important information and instructions.
- 9 We **support our staff** to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills (if needed).



Evaluating and improving

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



Training and resources

NALA delivers literacy awareness training for pharmacists - contact them for more information on this. In this booklet you will find advice and suggestions under each of the 10 quality standards.

How to become a Crystal Clear Pharmacy and achieve the Crystal Clear Mark

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

- 1 Go to www.nala.ie/health-literacy/crystal-clear-mark/ and complete the **online audit**. This involves answering **10** questions on:
 - how you communicate;
 - staff awareness and responding sensitively;
 - your policies and procedures and
 - how you evaluate and continually improve your service.

You will need to supply evidence such as photographs of clear signage, examples of medicine labels written in plain English and ways that staff communicate effectively with people in a literacy friendly way.

- 2 NALA assesses your audit and if you pass, you get the Crystal Clear Mark. You will be sent a certificate and door sticker, which you can display in your pharmacy. You can also mention it on your website.
- 3 If you do not pass the audit, NALA will send you feedback and request further evidence. If you need help or advice with this, NALA will discuss this with you and offer support where possible. Once you have provided all the evidence, you will get the mark.

The audit is available online at

www.nala.ie/health-literacy/crystal-clear-mark/

Crystal Clear Pharmacy



Delivering a Literacy
Friendly Service
2021–2023



**It is free to apply to the Crystal
Clear Pharmacy Programme.
The mark is awarded for three years.**

How to guides on the 10 quality standards



Over the next few pages we will take you through each of the 10 standards and look at how to:

- 1** Use plain English when speaking with people
- 2** Write a medication label in plain English
- 3** Check that people understand what you have told them
- 4** Make sure the layout of your pharmacy is clear
- 5** Improve staff awareness of literacy friendly work practices
- 6** Respond sensitively to people with literacy and numeracy needs
- 7** Develop a literacy friendly policy
- 8** Help people find and use important information and instructions
- 9** Support staff to improve their own literacy, numeracy and digital skills (if needed)
- 10** Evaluate and continually improve your literacy friendly service



1

How to use plain English when speaking with people

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;
- give relevant information in the right order; and
- help people to understand this information quickly.

To use plain English you first need to put yourself in your reader's shoes.



Here are some tips for using plain English when speaking:



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

For example: "Your prescription will be dispensed monthly – this means your prescription will be ready for you to collect on the first Monday of every month."

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

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

- **Watch your numbers**

When you talk to people 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?"

2 How to write a medication label in plain English

It is challenging to produce plain English medication labels due to regulations and restrictions in wording and the formatting of text in the electronic systems. However it is important that you know how to write a plain English label for someone who may need it.

Why use plain English on medication labels?

In a research study, researchers from North-western University¹ simplified the text and icons used in 9 prescription-medication warning labels. They then tested the standard warnings against the plain English warnings with no icons and with the new icons. 530 patients at medical clinics took part in the study and answered questions about their understanding of each warning. Almost 92% of patients correctly interpreted the plain English warnings with new icons (and with no icons). Only 79% correctly interpreted the standard warnings



¹ Professor Joe Kimble's: 'Writing for Dollars, Writing to Please: The case for plain language in business, government and law' (2012) Carolina Academic Press, North Carolina

What does a plain English medication label look like?

Before



100 CLONAMOX 125MG/5ML
PDRFOR ORAL SUSP
(AMOXICILLIN PDR/SUSP 125MG/5ML)
TWO 2.5 ML SPOONS
TWICE A DAY.
SHAKE WELL BEFORE USE; STORE
IN A COOL PLACE; DO NOT USE
AFTER <DATE>; SPACE THE DOES
EVENLY THROUGHOUT THE DAY.
KEEP TAKING THIS MEDICINE
UNTIL THE COURSE IS FINISHED,
UNLESS YOU ARE TOLD TO STOP.

After



100 Clonamox 125 mg / 5 ml
(Amoxicillin Penicillin anti-biotic)

**Take one 5 ml spoon in the
morning and one in the evening.**

Shake well before use.

Store in a cool place.

Do not use after <date>.

Space the does evenly
throughout the day.

Keep taking this medicine
until the course is finished,
unless you are told to stop.

Writing instructions in plain English

Common instructions

Written in plain English

ONE tablet to be taken
TWICE daily

Take 1 tablet in the morning
and 1 in the evening.

TWO SPRAYS TO BE USED
IN EACH NOSTRIL DAILY
FOR ONE WEEK THEN
USE ONE SPRAY IN EACH
NOSTRIL DAILY

Put 2 sprays in each nostril
every day for 1 week.

Then put 1 spray in each
nostril every day.

GIVE 7.5MLS TWICE DAILY
FOR SEVEN DAYS

Take 7.5 mls (one and a half
5 ml spoonfuls) in the morning
and in the evening for 7 days

INSTIL ONE DROP INTO
BOTH EYES TWICE A DAY

Put one drop into each eye –
one in the morning and one
in the evening.

Take 15 ml three times a day.

Take three 5 ml spoonfuls three
times a day (in the morning, at
lunchtime and in the evening)

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
has developed a Writing and Design Tips
booklet. It gives tips to make your materials
easier to read and understand. It is available at:

<https://www.nala.ie/publications/writing-and-design-tips/>



Here are some top tips:



✓ Easier to read when you... ✗ Harder to read when you...

Use lower case letters	Use capitals
Use a readable typeface. It is best to use sans serif fonts like Arial or Tahoma.	Use serif font such as Times New Roman
Use minimum of size 12	Use 10 point or lower
Use bigger text or bold for emphasis	Use underline or italics
Are specific – for example: Take 1 in the morning and 1 in the evening	Are vague – for example take one tablet 2 times a day
Use numerals instead of words	Use words for numbers – 2 is better than TWO
Use everyday words For example, use 'tell' instead of 'advise'; 'fill in' instead of 'complete'; 'start' instead of 'commence'.	Use medical jargon or abbreviations
Align text to the left	Centre the text
Add the purpose of the medication	Leave off the purpose of the medication

Plain English Checklist

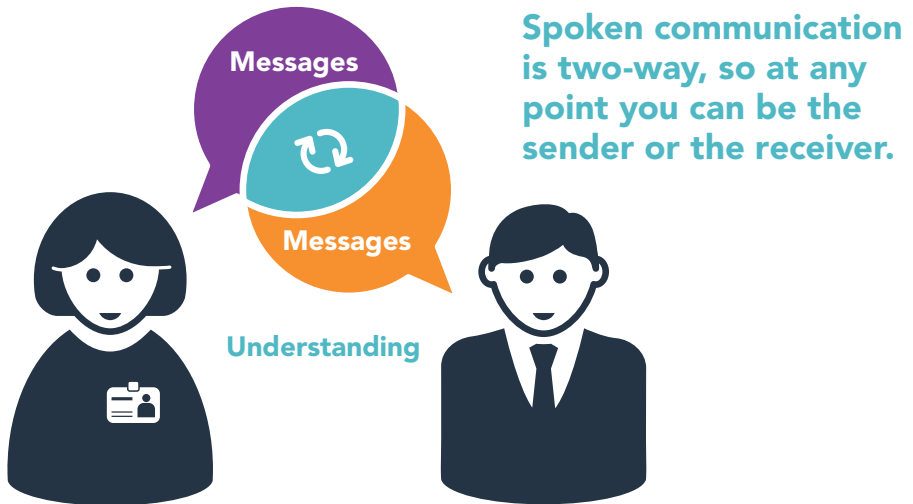
This checklist offers a quick way for you to review your medication label.



Language	Yes	No
1 Does it include clear instructions?	<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"/>
Font		
4 Is the font size at least 12 point?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Is the font type sans serif such as Arial or Tahoma?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Is the text in sentence case? (First letter of the sentence is a capital letter but the rest is lower case)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Does it avoid underlining and italics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Layout		
8 Is text aligned to the left?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3

How to check that people understand what you have told them



When you give a person their medication and instructions, 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 information in their own words.

For example: “We have talked about your medicines and I want to make sure I explained it all clearly. To ensure I didn’t miss anything can you tell me how you will take your medication when you go home?”

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



How to improve the layout of your pharmacy

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

Here are some questions to review your pharmacy environment.

Navigation Checklist

	Yes	No
1 Are the name of sections clearly shown?	<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 person to follow easily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5

How to improve staff awareness of health literacy and literacy friendly work practices

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

Know your customers

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 you are dispensing a person's medication, it is a good time to ask about how they are getting on with their current tablets and to discuss new medication.



Raising awareness video

NALA has developed a health literacy video which you can watch here at

www.nala.ie/health-literacy





How to respond sensitively to people with literacy and numeracy needs

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



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 customers 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 pharmacy 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.



How to help people find and use important information and instructions

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

Here are some tips:

- **Highlight the most important information**

When you give a person their medication, you **highlight the important information** that is on the medication label or instruction sheet. It is useful to show them where they can find this when they go home 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: "You must eat with these tablets – if not, you will feel sick. There are other side effects but this is the most important one; the others are here in the instruction leaflet if you want to look over them later."



How to support staff to improve their own literacy, numeracy and digital skills (if needed)

Many adults would like to brush up on their own literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

We use a huge amount of reading, writing and number skills in the workplace. Think of how many times we use these top skills each day.

Reading	Writing	Numeracy
Understanding health and safety information	Complete details on forms – for example accident report forms	Arrive at work on time and plan the use of time effectively
Read instructions	Fill in time sheets and work related documentation	Write down the sequence of numbers accurately
Read forms	Write telephone messages	Make calculations using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
Find and read information and reports	Write orders, receipts and invoices	Make necessary calculations of fractions, decimals and percentages

If one of your staff members would like to brush up on their skills they can:

1. Contact the NALA Freephone on **1 800 20 20 65** (Monday to Friday from 9.30 am to 5 pm) to talk to us about returning to learning.
2. Go online to **www.learnwithnala.ie** and start learning straight away.
3. Contact their adult literacy centre in their local Education and Training Board (ETB). Classes are free and in small groups. You will find the list of centres here **www.nala.ie/find-a-centre/**

10

How to evaluate and continually improve your literacy friendly service

As part of being a Crystal Clear Pharmacy 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 your literacy friendly practices. This ensures that actions to improve your services happen and that other staff are aware of these improvements.



Further information

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