

The Causal Pathways Linking Health Literacy to Health Outcomes

Michael K. Paasche-Orlow, MD, MA, MPH; Michael S. Wolf, PhD, MPH

Objective: To provide an evidence-based review of plausible causal pathways that could best explain well-established associations between limited health literacy and health outcomes. **Methods:** Through analysis of current findings in medical and public health literature on health literacy we derived a conceptual causal model. **Results:** Health literacy should be viewed as both a patient and a system phenomenon. Three distinct points along a continuum of

health care are suggested to be influenced by health literacy: (1) access and utilization of health care, (2) patient-provider relationship, and (3) self-care. **Conclusions:** The conceptual model organizes what has been learned to date and underscores promising areas of future inquiry and intervention.

Key words: causal pathways, health literacy, literacy, conceptual model

Am J Health Behav. 2007;31(Suppl 1):S19-S26
