

## **The National Plan for Action**

**Submitted Online:** <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/npa/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=1&lvlID=31>

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MLA submitted the following comments in support of the National Plan for Action, which captures the status of health disparities in our country and proposes 20 strategies for their elimination.

The Medical Library Association (MLA) supports the mission of The National Health Plan to eliminate health disparities in the United States, and believes that partnering with professional medical librarians will ensure successful fulfillment of the objectives outlined in the document, especially in the area of health literacy.

MLA's comments specifically address "Objective 3. Health and Health System Experience: Strategy 9. Health Communication: Actions 4 and 5."

MLA's Health Information Literacy (HIL) research project study found that health care providers responded positively to a health information literacy curriculum offered by librarians and to related resources and services, namely MedlinePlus (<http://medlineplus.gov/>) and the information referral system known as Information Rx (<http://informationrx.org/>). The study showed that a librarian-taught health information literacy curriculum did raise awareness about the issue among health care providers and increased both the use of National Library of Medicine consumer health resources and referrals to librarians for health information literacy support. Results of the national study are reported in detail in the October 2009 issue of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association (JMLA)* (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2759165/>) [1]. The curriculum for health care providers and a self-guided Web-based tutorial that can be used by anyone to learn more about health literacy and available information resources are available at <http://mlanet.org/resources/healthlit/>.

Further, a review of the literature supports the hypothesis that the services of a professional librarian results in enhanced staff effectiveness, optimized patient care, improved patient outcomes, and increased patient and family satisfaction with the hospital and its services [2].

For example, librarians:

- Assist patients in obtaining the best health information at the point of need.

- Play a patient advocacy role by informing patients of their right to ask questions, listening to patients and referring their comments to health professionals, uncovering health literacy and general literacy weaknesses and seeking solutions to overcoming these barriers [3].
- Play key roles in health literacy programs by helping patients to find information on the Internet, developing patient information packets, developing consumer health collections that include native language resources, and becoming involved in patient education and health professional training activities.
- Provide classes to health care providers in health literacy and cultural literacy competencies.
- Partner with their community outreach departments, going out into their communities to health fairs and community event to teach classes on how to find the most credible and reliable health information..
- Work with nurse educators in hospitals and social workers in the community to provide needed information, helping families locate community support services; and
- Collaborate with their professional colleagues to assure that information about care providers and community health resources are easily accessible through collaborative efforts such as MedlinePlus Go Local (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/golocal/index.html>).
- Partner with literacy groups, public and private schools, public libraries, senior-citizen facilities and organizations, and health care associations. These are win-win partnerships that improve health and healthcare outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities and for underserved populations and communities.

Clearly, professional medical librarians have the knowledge, skills, and expertise to support the work of The National Program, and further its goal to eliminate health disparities in the United States.

### **Potential Data Sources**

[1] Shipman JP, Kurtz-Rossi S, Funk CJ. The health information literacy research project. *JMLA*, 2009;97(4):293-301. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2759165/> [cited 3 Feb 2010].

[2] Holst R, Funk CJ, Adams HS, Bandy M, Boss CM, Hill B, Joseph CB, Lett RK. Vital pathways for hospital librarians: present and future roles. *JMLA*, 2009;97(4):285-292. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2759170/> [cited 3 Feb 2010].

[3] Vaida AJ, Zipperer L. Safe medication information delivery: the role of the medical librarian. *Patient Saf Qual Healthc 'Internet'*. 2006 Nov/Dec;3[cited 2 Feb 2010]. <http://www.psqh.com/novdec06/librarian.html>