Panel 4:
Where do we go from here? Next steps!

A Public Health Perspective for Health Literacy

Professor Jürgen M. Pelikan (LBIHPR, Vienna/Austria)

Health Literacy: Improving Health, Health Systems, and Health Policy Around the World
September 24, 2012,
New York Academy of Medicine, New York, NY
Where are we now? - 1

Health literacy (HL) of **people** (and of **systems**) is a specific & relevant **social determinant of health** which in principle can

- be **defined**, but there is still limited consensus on definitions
- be **measured**, but by a number of instruments differing in scope, content & psychometric qualities (Jordan et al 2010)
  - for general populations (rather few studies!)
  - for specific vulnerable groups (especially patients)
  - for systems, organizations, services, products (rather few studies!)
- be **compared** cross-sectional and longitudinally for purposes of diagnosis of problems and monitoring / evaluation of results of HL oriented (health promotion) interventions
- be **intervened/ taken into account** by a number of different measures on two levels, oriented at
  - improving competences of people ...
  - decreasing demands of systems, organizations, services, products (much less explored!).
Where are we now? – 2

n There is available, partly contradictory and fragmented, knowledge on distributions of health literacy and associations with
  o social causes/conditions/determinants of (lower) HL
  o vulnerable groups with (lower) HL
  o health relevant consequences of (lower) HL (e.g. health behavior, use of services, costs)

n But from the HLS-EU study, where we can compare 8 countries with an identical & comprehensive instrument, we know that there is considerable variation between countries,
  o not only for means, S.D., percentages of low health literacy,
  o but also for bivariate & multi-variate associations (and explained variance) of HL with possible determinants or consequences
  o (that holds true also for the NVS test and measures of self-assessed health!)
What are major deficits and challenges for research, practice and health policy from a public health perspective?

1. Development of comparable, comprehensive & economic (short-form) **population measures** for continuous monitoring of population HL

2. Development and use of **measures of demand for HL** by systems, services, products (health-literate organizations, e.g. Rudd & Anderson 2006; Institute of Medicine 2012)

3. Regular comparative & longitudinal population **studies** of HL (for bench marking)

4. Systematic & sustainable integration of HL in **health care services** (in their goals, mission statements, outcome definitions, structures & processes and everyday diagnosis & interventions)
Where do we go from here?

From a **public health perspective**, we should try to establish HL

- as a new type of **health index for societies** (complementing DALYs or mortality/morbidity data) (Ratzan 2001; Kickbusch 2002; WHCA 2011)
- or a population HL index (combining person’s skills & HL friendliness of key systems and settings) as a measure of **health development** (WHCA 2011),

That, we cannot do by scattered research and practice efforts!

Instead we have to follow well established examples of good and sustainable **international research practice** in other areas like:

- WHO´s HBSC study (developing from 5 participating countries in 1983/1984 to 40 in 2009/2010)

And for a long term goal have including a HL (short form) measurement in **official health statistics and health reporting**!
Next steps!

1. **Agenda setting, alliance building & allocation of resources** by relevant stakeholders for tackling the four prioritized issues in international partnerships

2. **Forming of international working groups** with clear goals, time frames and resources for planning and initiating projects

3. **Starting sustainable, but open international projects** for
   1. Development of an accorded, comprehensive, economical HL **population measuring instrument**
   2. Development of **measures for HL demand of systems**
   3. **Comparative population studies** using these instruments
   4. Systematically **integrating HL into health care services**
Thank you for your attention!

Contact:
juergen.pelikan@lbihpr.lbg.ac.at

http://www.lbihpr.lbg.ac.at
http://www.health-literacy.eu