



Guidelines
For Developing
Written Patient Education Material
September 2002

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1. Developing Content

1.1. Know who your target group is

- It is important to know your target group in terms of their health literacy, cultural background and demographics so that the messages are appropriate to their characteristics (e.g. if your target group is predominantly Muslim, then pork should not be mentioned in your text).

1.2. Set your objectives

- Be clear about what you are trying to achieve with this material.
- It is recommended that you concentrate on the “how to’s” rather than the “whys” as patients need to bring home and remember the practical tips.

1.3. Determine which information is the most important.

- Consider what are the critical facts:
What do patients need to know?
What do they want to know?
What would be nice for them to know?
- It is important not to overload patient with the “nice to know” information. Instead focus on what they need and want to know.
- Sketch an outline to lay out the important points before filling up with the details.

1.4. Maintain accuracy and thoroughness.

- The content of all patient education materials should be complete, accurate, consistent and based on facts.

1.5. Write in a warm, personal tone.

- Include affirmative and positive statements whenever possible, using “Do” instead of “Do Not”.
- Use a conversational style that is friendly and appealing.

1.6. Use the second person (“you”), rather than first person (“I”) or third person (“the patient”). This is more personal.

1.7. Disclaimer must be included.

- It should be clearly stated so that readers can understand it. (Appendix 1- Examples on Disclaimer)

2. Reading Level (Readability)

- 2.1. **Avoid medical terminology** whenever possible, define any essential medical terms in simple language.
- 2.2. **Use one or two syllable words.**
- 2.3. **Use short sentences** - no more than 15 words per sentence.
- 2.4. **Use short paragraphs** - no more than 10 lines per paragraph.
- 2.5. **Organisation of material**
 - Use a format that is inviting and facilitates reading.
 - Give clear headings for each section.
 - Use brief, eye-catching titles and subtitles to make information easier to comprehend.
 - Enlist points if possible. Avoid long paragraphs.
 - Use lists rather than a paragraph format.
 - Use bullets to organise the information.
- 2.6. **Be consistent in using the same words throughout the text.**
 - This is to reduce confusion when different words which mean the same things are used (e.g. medication, medicines).
- 2.7. **Use the active rather than passive voice.**
 - for e.g. “take your medicine at mealtime,” rather than “medicine should be taken at mealtime” as an active voice is easier to read and less formal.
- 2.8. **Use numerals (5,7),** which are more easily recognisable than spelling out the numbers (five, seven) in words. However, the word form should be used to begin a sentence.
- 2.9. **Prepare materials at the recommended reading level** of Secondary 2 level or lower.

3. Graphic Design

- 3.1. **Use readable fonts** such as Arial 11 for text. If you are writing for the elderly, use a larger font
- 3.2. **Use both upper and lower case.**
- 3.3. **Use clear illustrations** that are applicable to the intended target group.
- 3.4. **Use more graphics** to explain, avoid too much text.
- 3.5. **Provide adequate white space and ample margins.**
 - White space will make the text appear less crowded or dense. If possible, include pictures, which enhance memory and comprehension.

4. Permission and Copyright

- 4.1. **Obtain copyright clearance** before using previously published/ copyrighted materials.
- 4.2. **Obtain written consent** from patients before using photographs of recognisable patients.

5. Revision and Update

- 5.1. **Update materials regularly.** Recommended at 2 yearly intervals and whenever there are significant changes (e.g. Changes in location of clinics and telephone numbers have to be updated in the materials).
- 5.2. **Print the original date and latest revision date** on the material (e.g. Copyright © National University Hospital, July 2002).

APPENDIX 1

DISCLAIMER

- This information is given as a guide only and does not replace medical advice from your doctor. You should seek the advice of your doctor before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

References

The Johns Hopkins Hospital. 1998. Patient Education Manual: Standards for the Development /Selection of Printed Patient Education Materials. The Johns Hopkins Hospital, USA.

University of Utah Health Sciences Centre. 2002. Patient Education Materials an Author's Guide [Online]. Available [HTTP://www.med.utah.edu/pated/authors](http://www.med.utah.edu/pated/authors) [2002, August 21].

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