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The purpose was to collect assessment data with three separate health literacy tools and compare the efficiency of identifying individuals that are at risk for low health literacy levels.

Health Literacy is defined as the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions. Adults with basic or below basic health literacy skills (35% in the U.S.) have problems reading a chart and understanding simple medical instructions. Literature supports the association between low health literacy levels and poor health outcomes.

Approval for the project was obtained from the Human Subjects Committee. A partnership was formed with a local physician office to assess a total of 50 patients. Students worked in pairs and collected the following data: highest level of education, a single question assessment, the Newest Vital Sign (NVS) assessment, and the Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine- Short Form (REALM-SF) assessment.

Using linear correlation, the three tools are not well related. Of all participants, 96% reported that they never or rarely ask for help, yet on the NVS, 43% scored a limited or possibly limited health literacy result. Correlating education level: of those participants with a high school, technical, and associate degree, the average scores put them at a limited or possibly limited health literacy level. However, with those participants with a bachelor degree or higher, the average score was at a level of adequate health literacy.