Plain Language

What is Plain Language?

"Plain language (also called plain writing or plain English) is communication your audience can understand the first time they read or hear it."[1]

"Plain language does not mean bland writing or dumbing it down. It is direct, focused, and engaging. Plain language expresses ideas clearly… Cut out extra words that distract from the main message. Say it once and say it well."[2]

"Written materials are in plain language if your audience can:

- Find what they need;
- Understand what they find; and
- Use what they find to meet their needs."[3]

What does Plain Language look like?

- Simple words
- Short sentences
- Short chunks of information
- Active voice (eg. "give a snack" instead of "a snack should be given")[2]
- Communication written in language familiar to your audience.
- Personal, conversational tone
- Logical organization
- Easy-to-read layout and design

If you want to communicate in plain language, you need to know your **purpose** and your **audience**.

- Why are you communicating this information? What do you want your audience to do with this information?
- What are the wants, needs, abilities, and backgrounds of your audience? What motivates them?

Who benefits from Plain Language?

- **EVERYONE!**
- 55% of Canadian adults do not have the skills to get, understand and use health information and services.

Example of plain language writing

Original:

GOALS AND PURPOSE OF RADIATION THERAPY

Radiation uses high-energy beams and particles to disrupt the ability for cancer cells to reproduce and grow. It is used to kill cells and shrink a tumor. The goal of treatment is to destroy the tumor and ease uncomfortable symptoms caused by the tumor. Another goal of treatment is to minimize injury to healthy tissues. This is accomplished by careful treatment planning and treatment delivery by the Radiation Team. Radiation is also used to treat overgrowth of non-cancerous cells.

Written in plain language:

Radiation Therapy: Treatment Information for Patients

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy uses high doses of radiation to destroy cancer cells and tumors. Radiation can shrink tumors and prevent symptoms caused by tumors. Radiation may also be used to treat non-cancerous health conditions.[4]

Where can I find more information about Plain Language?

1. Available from: www.plainlanguage.gov. [Accessed September 2018]
2. Nichol, H & Woo, S. *Plain Language: A Vital Tool for Diabetes Education.* Available from: http://www.bcchildrens.ca/endocrinology-diabetes-site/documents/plainlanguage.pdf [Accessed May 2017]
3. The Plain Language Action and Information Network. *What is Plain Language?* Available from: http://www.plainlanguage.gov/whatisPL/index.cfm [Accessed May 2017]
4. Washington Patient Safety Coalition. *Plain Language Toolkit.* Available from: http://www.wapatientsafety.org/downloads/GHC-Plain-Language-Toolkit.pdf [Accessed August 2018]