

How a Health Literacy Specialist Provides Value



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In a [recent blog post](#), Priya Bathija, JD, VP of Strategic Initiatives at the American Hospital Association (AHA), notes that “as hospital and health systems explore tech-based services, it will remain important to meet patients and individuals not only where they are, but where they want to be” – ensuring each individual has “an equal opportunity to access and utilize digital solutions.”

This is a lofty goal, but the right expertise can go a long way toward achieving it. Healthcare organizations with staff trained in health literacy are better poised to equitably choose and implement digital solutions that are easy for their patient population to [find, understand, and use](#). These Health Literacy Specialists, as they are called, can provide immense value to their organization.

The Health Literacy Specialist Certificate Program



Health Literacy Specialist
Certificate Program



In 2016, the [Institute for Healthcare Advancement](#) (IHA) convened a diverse group of health literacy specialists and asked this question: “*What would an individual need to know, and be able to do, in order to be considered a Health Literacy Specialist?*”

That meeting served as a catalyst for the creation of IHA’s assessment-based [Health Literacy Specialist Certificate Program](#). The program comprises seven health literacy domains:

- Communication
- Community Engagement
- Education
- Ethics
- Language, Culture, and Diversity
- Organizational Systems and Policies
- Public Health

Participants earn continuing education credits, a micro-credential,* and a digital badge for completing coursework in any of these seven domains. Those who earn all seven micro-credentials are awarded a certificate of completion and are considered Health Literacy Specialists.

** The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) **defines a micro-credential** as “the formal recognition awarded to an individual who has demonstrated attainment of a narrow (or specific or limited) scope of knowledge, skills, or abilities.”*

How Health Literacy Specialists Can Leverage Their Expertise To Improve Patient Portals

Health Literacy Specialists can help healthcare organizations understand the people they serve, choose appropriate digital solutions, and implement this technology effectively. Here are some examples:

- **Communication.** Help healthcare organizations ensure their digital solutions promote effective communication and oversee usability testing to confirm that the patient portal is easy to use and accessible to the patient population
- **Community Engagement.** Help healthcare organizations work with community partners to improve health literacy in the community and oversee a Patient and Family Advisory Board gather feedback on the patient portal
- **Education.** Help healthcare organizations educate their staff and service population to promote health literacy and develop training for new patients on how to use the patient portal
- **Ethics.** Help healthcare organizations ensure their digital solutions support both health literacy and ethical standards and confirm consent forms in the patient portal can easily be found, understood, and used by the patient population
- **Language, Culture, and Diversity.** Help healthcare organizations ensure their digital solutions equitably promote health literacy in the patient population and confirm the patient portal has text and cultural adaptation in relevant languages
- **Organizational Systems and Policies.** Help healthcare organizations ensure their systems and policies support the adoption of digital solutions that promote health literacy and make the business case to leadership for why developing an accessible patient portal is necessary for the patient population
- **Public Health.** Help healthcare organizations ensure their digital solutions support both health literacy and public health and assess how redesigning the patient portal to comply with health literacy and accessibility principles impacts health outcomes in the patient population

Health Literacy Specialists meet people they serve both where they are and where they want to be. Thus, the **Health Literacy Specialist Certificate Program** is a powerful new tool for building organizational health literacy.

All proceeds from AHIMA members and supporters who enroll in the IHA Health Literacy Specialist courses support AHIMA Foundation programs, research, and projects. [Use these AHIMA promotional codes at check-out to receive special pricing.](#)

About the Author

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Michael Villaire, MSLM, is President/CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA). He has been directing IHA's health literacy initiatives since 2000. Prior to working at IHA, he served as managing editor for a number of peer-reviewed medical and nursing journals and produced national healthcare symposia. He earned baccalaureate degrees in English and Communications from Western Michigan University and a master's degree in nonprofit organizational leadership and management from the University of La Verne.