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## PREFACE

The second edition of *Teaching Patients with Low Literacy Skills* comes from the combined experiences of three authors who share a common concern for patients who have difficulty understanding health-care instructions due to their limited literacy skills. All three have had years of experience as volunteer tutors of adult nonreaders. Over the past ten years, the authors have conducted more than 200 workshops to train nurses, doctors, and other health-care practitioners in methods to make health-care instructions easier to understand.

Len and Ceci Doak (a husband and wife team) have analyzed more than 2,000 health-care instructions in all media, and provided advice on changes to make them more user-friendly for patients. Dr. Jane Root, with her colleagues at the Maine Area Health Education Center, has developed and patient tested scores of easy-to-read health materials. The results of these experiences, together with recent research, and the findings from a number of health education projects have been brought together in this second edition.

The second edition is intended for health-care practitioners and those who teach them. The new edition provides ideas, methods, and examples on how to simplify health instructions so that they are understood better by patients at all literacy levels—including those with low literacy skills.

Two new chapters have been included in this edition: Chapter 2, Applying Theory in Practice, and Chapter 8, Teaching with Technology. Chapter 2 provides guidance on applying behavior and learning theories in the design of health-care instructions. Chapter 8 offers practical advice and examples on teaching with audiotapes, videotapes, and multimedia—all of which are growing rapidly for patient education. As much as possible, each chapter has been made a complete unit of information on its subject, and provides extensive references.

The reader who is faced with the task of developing a written instruction will find that Chapter 6, Writing the Message, offers guidance and examples on both the planning and development steps. If visuals are to be included with the written message, Chapter 7, Visuals and How to Use Them, offers guidelines and examples.

We have tried to make our suggestions practical and useful to busy health practitioners who have little extra time. Since the research shows that well-educated adults learn much more from simply written material than from more difficult material, this edition has been written at an easy-to-read 7th- to 11th-grade level.

Health education is an inherent part of the practice of virtually all nurses, doctors, and other health practitioners. Health maintenance requires patient understanding of instructions, and is becoming an increasing role for all in the health-care field. The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Health Organizations (JCAHO) has recognized this by elevating the importance of patient

comprehension of health instructions in the accreditation process. All patients (or their guardians) can learn almost anything they need to know for their health care if it is taught appropriately. This second edition is dedicated to the health-care practitioners who are striving to achieve that goal.

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