A Breakthrough Health Literacy Program
Empowering Parents | Benefiting Children | Improving the Health Care System

“This program works at so many levels — for families, for medical facilities, for taxpayers. It is truly innovative.”
— Rhode Island Department of Health

UCLA/Johnson & Johnson
Health Care Institute
The Power of Partnerships: An Opportunity to Touch Millions of Lives and Save Billions of Dollars

In the brief period of time since its inception, the Health Care Institute has positively affected thousands of lives; children and families are healthier and thriving, demonstrating the significant benefits of increasing health literacy:

- Parents and families have been encouraged and supported to change their behavior, leading to happier, more productive lives.
- Parents have used medical services more efficiently and reduced health care costs.
- Employers, schools and other educational programs have benefited through reduced absenteeism.

This has been achieved through an innovative program that provides invaluable information in the context of a training experience that emphasizes self-help, and energizes parents by empowering them to play an even greater role in caring for the health of their children.

While Head Start families have been an initial focus of the Health Care Institute, the model can be easily and efficiently replicated in all states and with other community groups and partners (see box). The rewards are huge for children, parents, the health care system and taxpayers.

Expanding this innovative and compassionate health literacy program to hundreds of thousands of people could touch millions of lives in a most positive way and save our over-taxed health care system billions of dollars.

It is the Health Care Institute’s goal to develop partnerships with health care institutions, community-based groups, educational organizations, foundations, corporations and others who can utilize and advance this hands-on training model, enabling millions of children and families around the world to benefit from new-found health care knowledge.

You can play an important role in making this happen.

**States Taking Action for Children**

**Kansas** led the country in statewide efforts to help parents with low health literacy. In 2005-2006, it raised funds from local HMOs, hospitals and others to provide Health Care Institute training for all of the state’s Head Start agencies, affecting roughly 5,000 children.

In 2007, **New Mexico** adopted the Health Care Institute training program with support from Pfizer and is implementing it with 5,000 Head Start families.

**With the support of the Washington** Governor and legislature, the Health Care Institute is working on a statewide training program for roughly 6,800 families in Head Start, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, and programs in community health centers. This will run through 2010.

“The Health Care Institute has given thousands of parents the information and confidence to take better care of their children’s health. These parents are setting a powerful example for those around them, bringing enormous benefits to the whole community.”

— Sharon D’Agostino

Vice President, Corporate Contributions and Community Relations for Johnson & Johnson
The UCLA/Johnson & Johnson Health Care Institute

Solving Dilemmas Caused by Low Health Literacy

Each day, emergency rooms, clinics and doctors’ offices across the United States fill up with anxious parents who bring their children for minor ailments that could be treated at home. Often they wait for hours to see a medical professional. The children miss school, parents lose time at work and, usually, much-needed pay. Our overburdened health care system becomes more crowded and taxpayer costs for medical services at the local level and for the federal Medicaid programs escalate sharply.

The UCLA/Johnson & Johnson Health Care Institute, applying health training techniques based on academic research, is helping families and communities nationwide to overcome these dilemmas by addressing a root cause: low health literacy.

Moreover, the program has had startling benefits: parents have discovered a sense of empowerment, characterized by a marked improvement in their self confidence and self esteem, and willingness to share newfound knowledge with others in the community.

Approximately 90 million adults have trouble understanding and acting on health information — and this population is prone to use health services at a higher rate. Perhaps they are not proficient in English or have limited education and cannot check a medical guide or online service. Perhaps they do not have the confidence to tackle common childhood illnesses at home. Perhaps, in wanting the best care for their children, they simply assume they must seek professional help.

“What I find most compelling is that a very modest investment can have a huge return for our society.”
— Head Start Executive Director

The Health Care Institute proves that the challenges of low health literacy can be surmounted: that parents can gain the knowledge and skills to care for a sick child, thereby relieving the pressure on the health care system and reducing medical costs to the public. In short, empowering parents in this way has enabled them to become the first line of defense for their children’s health — and has untold benefits for society.

WHO PAYS FOR THE COST OF LOW HEALTH LITERACY?

The direct medical costs of low literacy are financed through additional hospital and office visits, longer hospital stays, and extra tests, procedures and prescriptions. While all payers fund these additional resources, taxpayers finance a disproportionate share.

Source: Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc.
Empowering Parents, Benefiting Children, Improving the Health Care System

Recognizing the low level of health literacy among parents in an initial core group of Head Start parents, the Health Care Institute was founded with a clear goal: to better serve low-income children and families by providing the appropriate tools to help them make more-informed decisions regarding their health. Four objectives guide the program:

- Empower parents in decision making for the health care needs of their children
- Enhance parents’ self esteem and confidence in meeting their parental objectives
- Enable parents to become better caregivers for their children by improving their health care knowledge and skills
- Provide training and information to participating child/family-focused organizations to successfully implement health care literacy training programs for families.

The results are tangible and profound. Since it began operations in 2001, the Health Care Institute has taught thousands of parents how to treat everyday childhood illnesses at home, easing the burden on local emergency rooms and clinics. At a one-time average cost of just $60 per family, the training achieves remarkable results. (See charts this page.)

Medicaid, which pays for care for many families with low health literacy, can potentially save at least $554 per family annually in direct costs related to clinic/ER visits.

- For the first 10,000 families trained in the program, this could mean a potential savings of $5.5 million.
- By training one million families, over half a billion dollars could be saved annually.

The impact goes far beyond the trained families. Parents share their knowledge and skills with family members and friends. Overall, empowering parents to care for their children at home reduces overcrowding in community health facilities, taking pressure off medical staffs and freeing them up to care for people with serious health problems.

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**How Parents’ Behavior Changed...**

- **Doctor Visits Per Child Per Year**
  - Pre-Training: 3.69
  - Post-Training: 2.19
  - 42% Drop

- **ER Visits Per Child Per Year**
  - Pre-Training: 0.79
  - Post-Training: 0.33
  - 58% Drop

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**...And the Impact at School and Work**

- **Average School Days Missed**
  - Pre-Training: 13.37
  - Post-Training: 9.53
  - 28% Drop

- **Average Work Days Missed**
  - Pre-Training: 6.71
  - Post-Training: 3.86
  - 42% Drop

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*“My son had a fever and I panicked a little bit, but then I remembered the training and I said, ‘Wait a minute. I don’t have to run to the ER. I know what to do.’”*  
— Head Start parent
The Health Care Institute is committed to ensuring 100 percent parental participation.

How the Program Works to Expand the Circle of Knowledge

The Health Care Institute training model is specifically designed to ensure that families, children and organizations achieve long-term, lasting benefits from participation. Faculty from UCLA and other renowned universities and experts in early childhood education participate to expand this circle of knowledge.

Train-the-Trainers

Programs selected to participate are required to attend a two-day Train-the-Trainer session that introduces them to the Health Care Institute and gives them the tools they need to successfully execute the program at the local level. This includes instruction in strategy implementation, project management, parent and staff motivation, marketing and community relations. Further, each organization develops a Health Improvement Project that outlines the particular program’s goals and serves as the tool to help the local teams plan the parent-training event. Finally, they participate in a mock parent-training session, a critical component of the Train-the-Trainers program that allows participants to see firsthand, from start to finish, the ideal way to conduct such a session.

All of this preparation ensures that the work of the Health Care Institute is customized to directly affect the children and families of the local communities.

Parent Training

Parent-training sessions are tailored to the demographic, language and cultural needs of the families at each participating organization. During the session, parents receive basic health care and medical information, and learn to use What to Do When Your Child Gets Sick, by Gloria Mayer, RN, and Ann Kuklierus, RN, a low-literacy guide covering more than 50 common childhood illnesses. Parents also receive hands-on instruction in key actions, such as taking temperatures and measuring medicine.

Measurement and Assessment

To measure the success of the program, parents are asked to complete an assessment prior to training and three months afterward. This exercise is designed to measure parents’ perceptions and knowledge of health care and their confidence or anxiety in taking care of their children when they are sick.

Post-training intervention with the families is central to the success of the program. These sessions, occurring monthly for three months, provide another one-on-one opportunity to reinforce the concepts learned at the parent training and to inquire about illnesses, treatment sites, and school or work absences. Perhaps most important, these meetings provide parents with ongoing encouragement and support.

"Any time you educate the general public about ways to help themselves, you benefit those who work in health care and in public safety.”
— Chief of Police

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“Our mission is to enable child/family focused organizations to effectively increase the health literacy of parents through a training and support program that gives them the knowledge, confidence and resources to care for common childhood ailments at home.”

—I have seen and done a lot of parent trainings, but I have never done anything that is as exciting as the Health Care Institute. Everybody needs it.”
—Head Start Executive Director

Ariella Herman, Ph.D.
Research Director of the Health Care Institute

An expert in the areas of child care and health care management, Dr. Herman brings quantitative and data analysis skills to bear on research related to social issues. She has been a key contributor to several programs conducted by the Harold and Pauline Price Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and teaches Operations in the MBA program at UCLA Anderson.

Dr. Herman consults for Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and conducts research on Head Start issues. She has received several awards for outstanding teaching, including the Head Start-Johnson & Johnson Outstanding Teaching Award and the Citibank Teaching Award. Dr. Herman holds a Ph.D. in management, an MS in engineering, a BA in mathematics and she is fluent in seven languages.

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