

# How Readable Are Hospital Discharge Instructions?

## The Problem

- The Joint Commission recommends that written material given to patients to be at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade standard reading level; The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid also recommend a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reading level for patient instructions.
- Patients discharged after hospitalization are provided with written instructions to complete the course of prescribed treatment; to identify reasons to return to the hospital; and to ensure that they know about their outpatient follow-up.
- When instructions are not presented in a clear and understandable manner, patients may not follow them. This, in turn, may increase relapse and/or readmission rates.

## Aim/Goal

To evaluate BIDMC patient discharge instructions from different departments to see if they meet JCAHO and/or CMS standards.

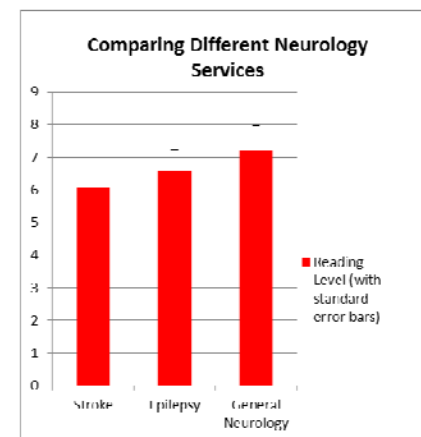
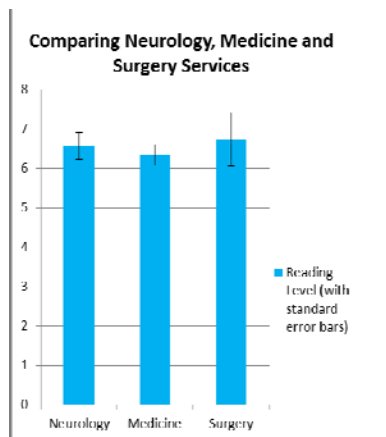
## The Team

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## The Interventions

- A random sample of 50 discharge instructions was obtained from the Neurology, Medicine, and Surgery services. The sample was selected from patients discharged from 1/1/13 – 6/30/13.
- The reading level for each set of instructions was analyzed using the automated Flesch-Kincaid reading level calculator in Microsoft Word.
- We compared:
  - reading levels between the three departments; and
  - reading levels within the neurology department broken down into three categories: stroke, epilepsy, and other.

## The Results/Progress to Date



## Lessons Learned

- In general, the reading level of discharge instructions is significantly higher than 4<sup>th</sup> grade level.
- There was no statistically significant difference between the different departments, or between the different services within one department.

## Next Steps/What Should Happen Next

- We will prepare templates for use in the Neurology Department that meets grade level suggestions; they will be placed on OMR to be available for use by all members of the department.
- After six months, we will repeat this experiment to see if use of the template has decreased the overall readability level of discharge instructions.
- We will also investigate other ways to improve patient comprehension of discharge instructions. This may involve using video or other non-verbal methods of communication.

