

Developing Patient Information Leaflets - Guideline

A survey carried out by the Department of Health and Children in 2002 showed that 17.9% of those interviewed found health information difficult to access and understand. A good Patient Information Leaflet is one that is clear and easy to understand. This means that the information is presented in a way that allows the reader to understand and act on it after a single reading. To achieve this, it is important that you adapt the content (tone, style, words and amount of information) to ensure it is easy accessible and meaningful for the target audience. Research shows that this is particularly important for older people, ethnic minorities, people for whom English is not their first language, those with literacy difficulties and those who have not completed their formal education.

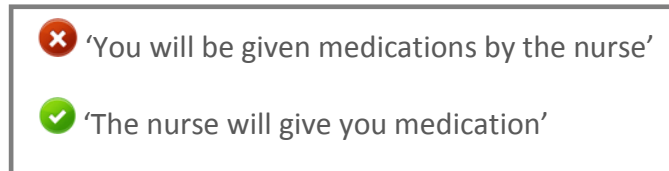
This guideline provides some brief tips on how to achieve this when developing your Patient Information Leaflet. If you would like more information, the *HSE Plain Language Style Guide for Documents* is a very useful tool and provides lots of practical information on how to ensure that your documents are written in a user-friendly style. This is available at: http://www.lenus.ie/hse/bitstream/10147/98048/1/HSE_Style_guide.pdf.

Key tips when developing your Patient Information Leaflet:

- Stick to what is meaningful and practical rather than trying to be very comprehensive. The Information Leaflet should *complement* face to face discussions with the patient – not replace them.
- Aim for 1-3 pages.
- Limit each paragraph to one idea.
- Keep the amount of text to a minimum.
- Use 'we' and 'you' in your writing as much as possible
- Use images and diagrams where possible to make the meaning clearer (but not to decorate the document)
- Remember the document will be printed in black and white – keep this in mind when selecting images and use black font rather than colour.
- Use simple language. Replace complicated words and phrases with everyday alternatives and avoid Latin or French words. Do not use medical jargon. For example:

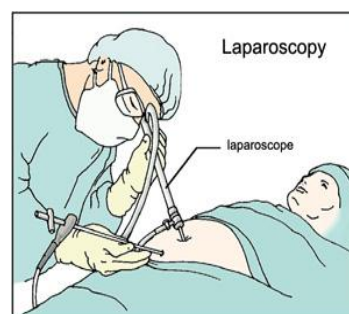
analgesic	→	painkiller
commence	→	start, begin
hypertension	→	high blood pressure
canula	→	bung/needle in arm for giving medication/fluids
au fait	→	familiar with

- Use active verbs as much as possible – put the ‘doer’ (actor) before the verb. For example:

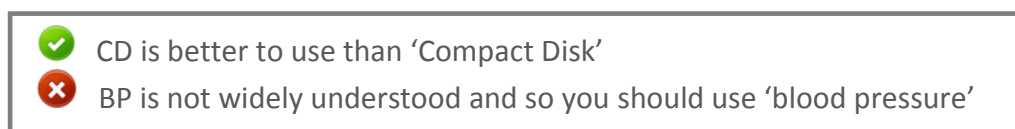


- Define essential specialist terms the first time you use them. For example:

You have an appointment for laparoscopy on 14th April 2013. A laparoscopy is a type of surgery where a small incision is made in the abdomen wall to allow an instrument with a fiberoptic camera to view the organs inside the abdomen and pelvis area.



- Use acronyms sparingly – generally only if they are more familiar to the audience than the full words or term they represent. For example:



- Write in date, month and year format without any commas. For example: 29th September 2013.
- Use ‘for example’ instead of e.g. and ‘that is’ instead of i.e.
- Do not use ‘etc.’ at the end of sentences. Instead, replace it with ‘and so on’ or reorder your sentence.
- Write seven digit numbers as 3 numbers space 4 numbers. Write area codes in brackets. e.g. (01) 882 3461
- Font should be Arial size 12 (or larger) with 1.5 spacing. There should be a space of one line between paragraphs.
- Do not underline words, write them in all capital letters or italicise them. If you want to emphasise words, put them in bold or put the message in a box.
- For very common procedures, you may want to consider developing versions in other languages to support those for whom English is not a first language. You may also want to consider adapting your leaflet for those with communication or visual impairments if this is of particular relevance to your target audience.