

1.20 The Future of ESOL Health Literacy: A Wish List

Unfortunately, harsh economic realities dominate the current climate in adult ESOL education and many other professional arenas taking part in health literacy efforts in Virginia and the U.S. Most fields involved are doing more with less and learning out of necessity to be more creative in the ways they get things done. In some ways, this climate makes increasing health literacy efforts more onerous. At the same time, with the health care system being such a huge player in the U.S. economy and virtually everyone agreeing that changes are needed to make U.S. health care work better, we can't afford not to redouble efforts to improve health literacy. The effectiveness of the health care system is inextricably tied to the ability of its patients to use that system efficiently and effectively.

The ESOL field can increase its contribution to this cause. To do so, it will need to participate in interdisciplinary efforts, some of which already exist and some of which are currently lacking in Virginia. The following is a wish list toward that end, a brainstorming of resources that would be very helpful in supporting ESOL health literacy in Virginia and the U.S.

- A state and/or national discussion to reach consensus on what is needed for ESOL learners in the way of health literacy instruction
- Regularly accessible online and face-to-face teacher training on ESOL health literacy for new teachers, promoted by program directors
- Support and "buy-in" of program directors regarding ESOL health literacy teaching and training
- Encouragement for all teachers to teach ESOL health literacy topics – and to use materials beyond traditional textbook content
- A Virginia physician "champion" for improving ESOL health literacy who would be willing to help build bridges between health care and adult ESOL in the state
- An interdisciplinary consortium working on ESOL health literacy concerns in Virginia
- Funding and time for ESOL classroom-based research on health literacy
- A reviewed web collection of specifically ESOL-appropriate teaching materials and professional articles on health literacy
- A web-based ongoing discussion of issues of relevance to ESOL health literacy
- An online interdisciplinary journal to explore ESOL health literacy issues
- An increase in local partnerships between hospitals, clinics, and adult ESOL programs

