

Clear Communication

Section: Health and welfare

written by Rima Rudd | October 23, 2024



The widespread use of the world wide web, computers, tablets, and smartphones seems to fully support Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and guarantee access to scientific and cultural advancements for all. Scientific and medical information is readily available to anyone who can 'connect'. Of course, our new technology also provides opinions, beliefs, propaganda, and falsehoods as well as knowledge based on rigorous study. Determining what is fact or fiction is a serious challenge for everyone. But so too is understanding and using the scientific and medical facts provided.

It is important to make a distinction between *available* information and *accessible* information. A good deal of the scientific and medical information people seek is readily *available* but **not accessible**. Several thousand studies have shown that scientific and medical texts are often poorly written with complex sentences, strange vocabulary, or complicated charts that are difficult for a lay person to understand. Accessible information is organized, clearly written or stated, with everyday words, explanations, and examples. All too often, professionals in science, health, and medicine use jargon or the 'secret language' of their work. They may leave out needed explanations because they make faulty assumptions about what people know.

Scientists and medical professionals are now being encouraged

to translate their information into everyday words and to explain the processes and concepts they take for granted. Science writers, for example, need to develop their texts with rigor. They must test them with members of their intended audience to be sure they are understandable and usable. Scientists need to translate their findings into everyday terms and numbers with examples and explanations. Health professionals need to avoid medical jargon and make it easy for people to ask questions. Many professional schools, for example, now train their students to take responsibility for communication. Professionals are being taught not to ask: *do you understand?* because this question puts the burden on the shoulders of the listener or patient. A better question is: *was I clear? Or did I leave anything out? and What questions do you have for me?*

Guaranteed access requires scientists and health professionals to engage in real dialogue and to write and speak with clarity in the everyday language spoken at the kitchen table. Only then can information be accessible.

[Image by [Hush Naidoo Jade Photography](#) from [Unsplash](#)]