

# Health literacy impacts chance of heart failure hospitalization, study says

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Being able to read and understand words like anemia, hormones and seizure means a patient with heart failure may be less likely to be hospitalized, according to a new study from Emory University School of Medicine. Findings will be presented Nov. 17 at the American Heart Association Scientific Sessions conference in Chicago.

The research, led by Emory cardiologist Javed Butler, MD, MPH, professor of medicine, Emory School of Medicine and director of [Heart Failure](#) Research at Emory Healthcare, involved the use of a simple test called the Rapid Estimates of Adults Literacy in Medicine (REALM-R).

"This study lends more insight about the importance of health literacy and the impact it has on a patient's participation in their care," says Butler, who also serves as the deputy chief science advisor for the American Heart Association. "We learned that below optimal [health literacy](#) is driven by low socioeconomic status and is associated with increased admission rates in patients with heart failure."

REALM-R is a word recognition test designed to assist medical professionals in identifying patients at risk for poor literacy skills and playing a role in predicting their ability to control a chronic condition like heart failure. Adults are asked to de-code or pronounce a short list of words. The test takes less than two minutes to administer and score.

Emory researchers administered the REALM-R test to 154 heart failure outpatients from January 2008 to July 2009. People with a score of 60 or

lower (considered low or marginal) had a 55 percent higher rate of hospitalization for any reason.

Among the 154 patients, 30 had a low REALM-R score. People with annual family income less than \$50,000, African-Americans, and people without a college-level education were much more likely to have a low REALM-R score (ten-fold, five-fold and five-fold, respectively). Gender was not linked to REALM-R score.

What doctors call "hard events" (death, urgent [cardiac transplantation](#), or ventricular assist device implantation) did not increase based on low REALM-R score.

**More information:** More information about the REALM-R test is available here: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1494969/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1494969/)

Provided by Emory University

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