

## **Readability of Hospice Materials to Prepare Families for Death**

**Karen A. Kehl, RN, PhD**

**Kayla N. McCarty**

### **Background:**

Printed education materials can be a great resource for patients and families using hospice services when they are written at a suitable reading level. The average adult American reads at an eighth to ninth grade level, with about one in five at or below fifth grade reading level (Doak, 1996). Health care education materials should be written at the fifth to sixth grade reading level (Albright, 1996).

**Research Objective:** Determine the readability of written materials used by hospices throughout the United States to prepare families for care around the time of death.

**Methods:** This descriptive study is a secondary analysis of 150 written educational materials used by 170 hospices. Materials were obtained by surveying 400 hospices from across the U.S. Readability scores were determined using the WordsCount website (<http://wordscount.info/index.html>). Four measures were used: 1) Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG), 2) Flesch reading ease, 3) Flesch-Kincaid grade level, and 4) the ratio of big words (words of  $\geq 3$  syllables) to total words.

**Results:** SMOG mean 11.06, SD 1.36. Flesch reading ease mean 60.98, SD 8.77. Flesch-Kincaid grade mean 8.95, SD 1.80. Mean ratio of big words to total words .1165, SD 0.03.

**Conclusion:** The mean SMOG grade indicates that these hospice materials are written at a level higher than recommended. Flesch reading ease and grade levels were appropriate for the average adult in the U.S., but are above the recommended level for health care materials.

**Implications for Research, Policy, or Practice:** The foremost needs of a family caring for a dying loved one are communication and information (Lowey, 2008). Hospices commonly use written materials to assist in providing information to family caregivers. Materials that are written at high reading levels may not be comprehensible for caregivers and may impair their ability to provide adequate end-of-life care for their loved ones.