
 Literacy for Health™


READ TIME:

5-6 minutes

VALORENA PUBLISHING'S LITERACY FOR HEALTH™

Collaborators & Collaboration Series

EDITOR'S NOTE | LITERACY FOR HEALTH™

Health literacy is often defined narrowly—access to information, the ability to read labels, or the capacity to navigate medical systems. At Valorena Publishing, Literacy for Health™ extends further.

Literacy for Health™ examines how individuals leverage literacy to build subject-matter expertise and reclaim agency within complex health systems.

Collaborators & Collaboration is a recurring inquiry examining how people translate complex health systems, environmental realities, and lived experiences into practical understanding that drives informed action and meaningful outcomes.

Each edition explores how literacy—clinical, cultural, environmental, financial, and policy-driven—moves from abstraction into application. This is not a profile series. It is an applied study of how knowledge-building strengthens agency.

In this edition, we examine the work of Alesia B. Jackson, President and CEO of Abundant Health Consulting, as one example of self-directed health literacy in action.

WHEN WELLNESS BECOMES A CALLING

*In Conversation with Alesia B Jackson,
President and CEO at Abundant Health Consulting*

Presented by Valorena Publishing.

*Interviewed by Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez,
Founder, Valorena Publishing*

In Orange County, California—where sun-warmed suburbs stretch wide and Black families like ours often lived “in between” worlds—Alesia Boatright Jackson grew up learning how to find her footing. Her upbringing, much like mine, carried the imprint of striving, community, and the lessons passed quietly through generations of women who knew how to hold families together with grace.

Alesia entered adulthood with a mind built for communication and clarity, earning two bachelor’s degrees from USC’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. While she didn’t yet know it, those early academic choices foreshadowed the role she would eventually claim: interpreter of complex ideas, a guide through the thicket of modern health, and narrator of her family’s own wellness story.

Her father was a physician, giving her early exposure to the language of medicine and pharmaceuticals. Her professional journey began in business—recruiting, training, marketing—before she stepped into the high-stakes world of pharmaceutical sales.

There, working with the country’s top pharmaceutical company, she learned to translate medical language into something physicians could absorb quickly: new research, new therapies, new ways to treat longstanding conditions. It was a demanding career, and for many years she navigated it skillfully, building relationships across specialties and medical environments.



abundant
HEALTH CONSULTING

Alesia B. Jackson

But even then, she sensed the disconnect. So much of what ailed people—especially Black and Brown families—could not be found in a lab report. Medication often addressed symptoms, not their origins. Chronic disease was threaded through stress, environment, food, culture, habit, and history.

Then life delivered its own turning point.

Within six months, Alesia lost her physician father, her brother, and her mother, Peggy. For those who knew her, Peggy was brightness embodied. Her greeting to me —“How’s my girl?”—still echoes with the softness and certainty of someone who saw you fully. I remember seeing her one winter during a civic gathering, sensing something had shifted. A few months later came news of her hospitalization. From a distance, I watched Alesia navigate her mother’s decline—a descent marked by confusion, fear, and questions without answers—until eventually the diagnosis arrived: two forms of Alzheimer’s.

Data Snapshot: Health & Disparity

- Black Americans are approximately twice as likely as white Americans to develop Alzheimer’s disease.
- Chronic stress contributes to inflammation, metabolic dysfunction, and accelerated biological aging.
- Ultra-processed foods now comprise over half of caloric intake in the U.S. diet.
- Black women experience disproportionately higher rates of hypertension and diabetes.

Health literacy is not academic — it is survival infrastructure.

When Alesia speaks about her mother’s illness today, she does not do so as a daughter alone, but with the depth of someone who has studied the disease from the inside out—its metabolic underpinnings, inflammatory pathways, the disproportionate toll it takes on Black women. The research is personal. The technical mastery is earned.

That heartbreak became her breakthrough.

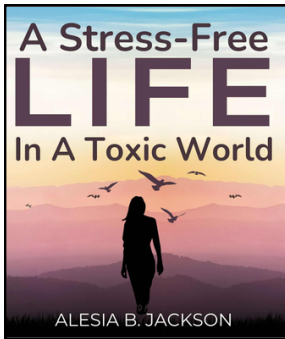
Leaving corporate America in 2006, Alesia rebuilt her life from the ground up. She returned to the fundamentals of health—nutrition, sleep, stress, movement, environment—and began studying them with a journalist’s curiosity and a scientist’s discipline. Her training deepened: wellness coaching, Transformational Nutrition, hormone health, gut health... Over the years, she crafted an approach that reflects both lived experience and scholarship—one centered on nourishment, metabolic balance, emotional steadiness, environmental awareness, and the inner life that sustains it all.

Her work is shaped by one overriding truth: women, especially women of color, are often the backbone of their families while being the least supported in their own healing.

“We take ourselves off our own priority list,” Alesia says. “It’s detrimental. It leads to dysfunction, disease, and premature death.”

Her philosophy grew first inside her home. New routines took root—plant-forward meals, bedtime rituals, daily movement, mindful supplementation, reduced environmental toxins. What emerged became her signature approach: change one habit each month. Small shifts. Big impact. The kind of shifts that create tectonic ripples felt down to the cellular level.

A central theme in her work is literacy—not in the traditional sense, but the literacy of living inside one’s body with awareness. She teaches clients to read labels the way one might read prose: carefully, questioning every word and hidden meaning. She teaches them to read their own rhythms—cycles, cravings, fatigue, inflammation—and to understand what health feels like from the inside.



The Five Elements of Abundant Health™

- 1.) Nourishment
- 2.) Emotional Wellness
- 3.) Hormone & Metabolic Balance
- 4.) Environmental Health
- 5.) Spiritual Grounding

Her book, *A Stress-Free Life in a Toxic World*, contributes to a growing body of work examining stress physiology, environmental burden, and metabolic resilience through a culturally grounded lens. Part testimony, part guide, and part critique, it reflects both lived experience and applied research. Rather than offering quick fixes, the work invites readers into a longer conversation about agency — what it means to understand one’s body deeply enough to make sustained, informed change.

Today, Alesia’s work is as much about lineage as it is about health. She and her husband have built a life in Southern California, raising two adult children who embody the family’s commitment to growth and service. One now studies public health at Columbia University, weaving the next thread into a generational tapestry of care and advocacy.

And it is here, unexpectedly, that our stories curve toward each other once more. Just as her daughter is now deep in public health at Columbia, I once walked the halls of Columbia Journalism School, where I learned how to write with precision about the very systems—health, medicine, access, literacy—that we both work to illuminate. Our paths, which began as parallel lines in the same Southern California county, have converged again decades later, shaped by similar losses and driven by similar purpose.

Two young Black pageant queens from Orange County—she “Miss Villa Park” in Villa Park, California, and I a Color Day Princess at neighboring Santa Ana High School – for those unfamiliar with the area, our respective high schools are also the alma maters of actors Kevin Costner (Villa Park High School) and Diane Keaton (Santa Ana High School) – have now grown into women who understand the cost of health inequity and the power of literacy, knowledge, and agency to change it.


At her core, Alesia embodies a truth at the center of Literacy for Health™:

Understanding heals. Knowledge empowers. Agency transforms.

In a healthcare landscape that too often prioritizes treatment over prevention — and compliance over comprehension — literacy becomes resistance. To understand one’s body, environment, and risk is to reclaim authorship over one’s health story.

When women, particularly women of color, are equipped not merely with prescriptions but with interpretation, context, and tools, the trajectory of families shifts. Prevention becomes possible. Intervention becomes earlier. Outcomes improve.

Health is not simply the absence of disease. It is informed choice. It is metabolic awareness. It is emotional steadiness. It is the daily discipline of paying attention.

And that is where literacy lives. 

Three Ways to Practice Health Literacy This Month

- Read one ingredient label each week as if it were prose — slowly and critically.
- Track one body rhythm (sleep, energy, mood, cycle) for 30 days. Patterns tell stories.
- Replace one ultra-processed staple with a whole-food alternative.

Small questions begin structural shifts.

FROM THE PUBLISHER'S SHELF

A LITERACY FOR HEALTH™ READING PATHWAY

Further Reading in the Expanding Field of Health Literacy

Metabolic & Preventive Health

- Why We Get Sick (2020) — Benjamin Bikman
- The Doctor's Kitchen (2017) — Rupy Aujla

Stress & Embodiment

- Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection (2023) — Jeremy Nobel
- Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers (2017 ed.) — Robert Sapolsky
- My Grandmother's Hands (2017) — Resmaa Menakem

Health Equity & Structural Context

- Medical Apartheid (2006) — Harriet A. Washington
- Legacy: A Black Physician Reckons with Racism in Medicine (2023) — Uché Blackstock

Food Systems & Environmental Justice

- Ultra-Processed People (2023) — Chris van Tulleken
- Afro-Vegan (2014) — Bryant Terry

FOUNDER'S REFLECTION

DR. VALERIE WILLIAMS-SANCHEZ

Translation Is a Form of Care.

Information is abundant. Interpretation is not.

Pharmaceutical systems translate science for physicians. Public health translates systems for communities. Both are forms of mediation. Both are acts of care.

The question is not whether knowledge exists. The question is who can access, interpret, and act on it.

When literacy expands beyond reading text to reading risk, reading stress, reading labels, and reading policy, it becomes structural power. At its core, Literacy for Health™ is about demystification.

Healthcare systems are layered. Policy shifts are constant. Research evolves. Terminology is dense. When information remains opaque, agency narrows. When understanding expands, so does choice.

What emerges in this edition is not simply a story of wellness—it is an example of how individuals build subject-matter expertise through deliberate reading, research, and disciplined inquiry.

Literacy is not passive consumption. It is structured study. Over time, that study becomes expertise. Expertise becomes confidence. Confidence becomes agency.

Upcoming editions will explore shifts in Medicare and Medicaid policy and what they mean for everyday decision-making—because literacy is not only about prevention. It is about preparedness.

Understanding clarifies. Clarity empowers. Empowerment protects.

— Toward greater clarity and collective agency —

Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez

About the Author: Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez

Dr. Valerie Williams-Sanchez is Founder of Valorena Publishing and creator of Literacy for Health™, a framework examining how literacy strengthens health agency across systems and communities.



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