

## Moderator Opening Remarks

*William Smith, Ed.D.,  
Executive Vice President,  
Academy for Education Development*

William Smith, Ed.D., Executive Vice President, Academy for Educational Development  
Dr. Smith, a member of the IOM Committee on Health Literacy, described health literacy as a cultural phenomenon. In order to be a truly health literate society, we have to be aware of how culture shapes our understanding of health. We are accustomed to thinking of health literacy as an *individual* competency or deficit, and asking the question, is she or he literate? But a more appropriate question is, are we a health literate *nation*?

He reminded attendees that there are thousands of professionals and educators who are working hard to improve the health literacy of adults, and he urged participants to help those in the field evaluate their efforts.

The day's presentations address the scope and the public health consequences of limited health literacy. Dr. Smith noted that the research presented at the workshop has already been through rigorous scientific review. Participants' job is not to analyze the validity of the results but rather the relevance of the conclusions and their implications for public health practice.