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Language barriers impact emergency medical services: Preliminary results

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Language Barriers Impact Emergency Medical Services:

Preliminary Results

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Emergency medical services (EMS) care is a continuum that relies on accurate and efficient communication. Impact of language barriers in other healthcare settings is well-documented. Scant research on prehospital language barriers.
“And he kept saying ‘sangria sangria sangria’ and I didn’t know what “sangria” meant. And I didn’t know why he kept saying that to me...I was like “wine, is there wine in his pocket?” I didn’t understand, like what he was telling me.”
"Her blood pressure was up and everything was serious...it sounded as if it could've been a heart problem, and when we saw the vital signs we thought it could be a heart problem...

...so then the other questions started coming in, so then it came out that there was a fight. And then it was like 'Oh, okay, now we understand.'"
Study Objectives

Describe formal and informal strategies utilized by EMS providers to overcome language barriers.

Describe decision-making by EMS providers when faced with language barriers.
Study Design

2 components
- Survey
- Interviews

2 types of data
- Quantitative
- Qualitative

Locations
- New Mexico
- South Africa
All dispatchers in study dispatch centers
Excluded if not working at time of survey or still in training
58 New Mexico respondents (overall 84.5% response rate)

Mixed Methods Design

Survey

Quantitative
- Demographics
- Language proficiency
- Frequency of language barriers
- Frequency of impaired care
  - Types of strategies used
  - Stress and difficulty
  - Preparation and training
  - Frequency of impaired assistance

Qualitative
- Effect of language barriers on care
- Biggest challenges in facing language barriers

All dispatchers in study dispatch centers
Excluded if not working at time of survey or still in training
58 New Mexico respondents (overall 84.5% response rate)
EMS field medics at all levels of training if dispatched by one of the four study dispatch centers
Excluded if still training, no shifts within past 30 days, no pediatric patients

Follow up with a combined analysis of Interviews and Surveys.
Results

Dispatcher perception of the impact of language barriers on medical care

Impact of language barriers on patient care and transport decisions

EMS strategies to overcome language barriers in the field
Dispatchers’ Perception of Language Barrier Impact

Percentage of EMS call-takers in each site

Frequency that language barriers impact medical care:
- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

- BernCo
- AFD
- San Juan
Impact on Decision Making

Increased likelihood of transport (36%)

Increased reliance on next provider in chain (48%)
Strategies: In the Spirit of EMS

Body language (80%)

Bystander translators (84% Adult, 28% child)

Reliance on objective assessment (76%)

Telephonic Interpreter (32%)

Digital Tools (24%)
Recommendations

Telephonic interpreters (44%)

Language classes (73%)
Framework for Next Steps

- Get the lay of the land
- Test interventions & tools
Questions?