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# Meeting the communication needs of hospitalized limited English proficiency patients by educating health care providers on interpreter language services



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## Introduction

Language barriers hinder effective communication between limited English proficiency (LEP) patients and healthcare providers. This can lead to challenges at every level of the healthcare system. When rounding on LEP patients on 5 West (a medical-surgical unit at UNMH), staff speaking the same language as the patients noticed that these patients were anxious due to a lack of familiarity with procedures, lab draws, medications, etc. LEP patients did not understand how to call for help when needed, how to turn on the TV, how to use the bed controls, and most importantly, they didn't know what their medical plan of care was. Brooks et al. mention that providers sometimes think that LEP patients understand more than they actually do and LEP patients may feel that their care was inferior when there was inadequate interpretation. Failure to use interpreter language services and equipment may lead to wrong diagnoses, negative health outcomes and dissatisfaction with care.

## Objectives

To investigate whether interpreter language services and equipment were being used on 5 West to meet the communication needs of LEP patients.

Specific aims:

- To improve nurse, physician and patient care technician (PCT) use of interpreters/equipment through education in order to improve communication and quality of care for LEP patients.

## Methods

- This research study consisted of pre and post surveys of staff, providers, and LEP patients.
- Nursing staff and internal medicine residents were surveyed on knowledge of interpreter equipment before and after an educational session provided by Interpreter Language Services (ILS) designed to educate healthcare workers on its services, resources and equipment. P-values obtained using McNemar's test for paired data.
- 99 Surveys of LEP patients were obtained before and 99 after the staff and provider education provided by ILS. P-values obtained using z-test of proportions.

## Results

37 staff and 38 providers were surveyed pre and post education on interpreter services and equipment

1. Do you know where the interpreter equipment is stored in your unit?

**Staff (nurses and techs)**  
Pre data: 87% yes Post data: 86% yes NS  
**Providers (internal medicine residents)**  
Pre data: 16% yes Post data: 43% yes  
**p < 0.01**

2. Do you know how to use the interpreter equipment?

**Staff**  
Pre data: 67% yes Post data: 84% yes NS  
**Providers**  
Pre data: 15% yes Post data: 66% yes  
**p < 0.01**

- Most common barriers = time and availability
- Most helpful = using in-person interpreters
- Suggestions for ↑ effect of ILS = more interpreters
- Suggestions for ↑ effective communication with LEP = more interpreters on unit

## Results

LEP patient survey questions and results were:

1. When you were admitted to 5 West did the nursing staff let you know about interpreter services and equipment?

Pre data: 82% yes Post data: 80% yes NS

2. Did the nursing staff use the interpreter services/equipment to orient you to your room and daily routines?

Pre data: 79% Post data: 85% NS

3. Does the nursing staff frequently offer interpret services/equipment when you need to communicate with them?

Pre data: 59% always Post data: 69% always NS

4. Does the nursing staff explain your medications, tests, labs, diet, daily goals, etc. with the help of interpreter services/equipment?

**Pre data: 56% always Post data: 74% always p < 0.01**

5. Does the nursing staff communicate with you about activities of daily living with the help of interpreter service/equipment?

**Pre data: 51% always Post data: 68% always p < 0.01**

6. Do you feel that the nursing staff is properly trained on the use of interpreter equipment?

Pre data: 69% always Post data: 76% always NS

7. Do the doctors use interpreter services/equipment?

**Pre data: 61% always Post data: 77% always p = 0.02**

8. Do you feel your communication needs are being met?

**Pre data: 66% always Post data: 88% always p < 0.001**

9. What is your preferred way of communicating with the nursing staff?

**Pre data: 96% prefer an in-person interpreter Post data: 96% prefer an in-person interpreter**

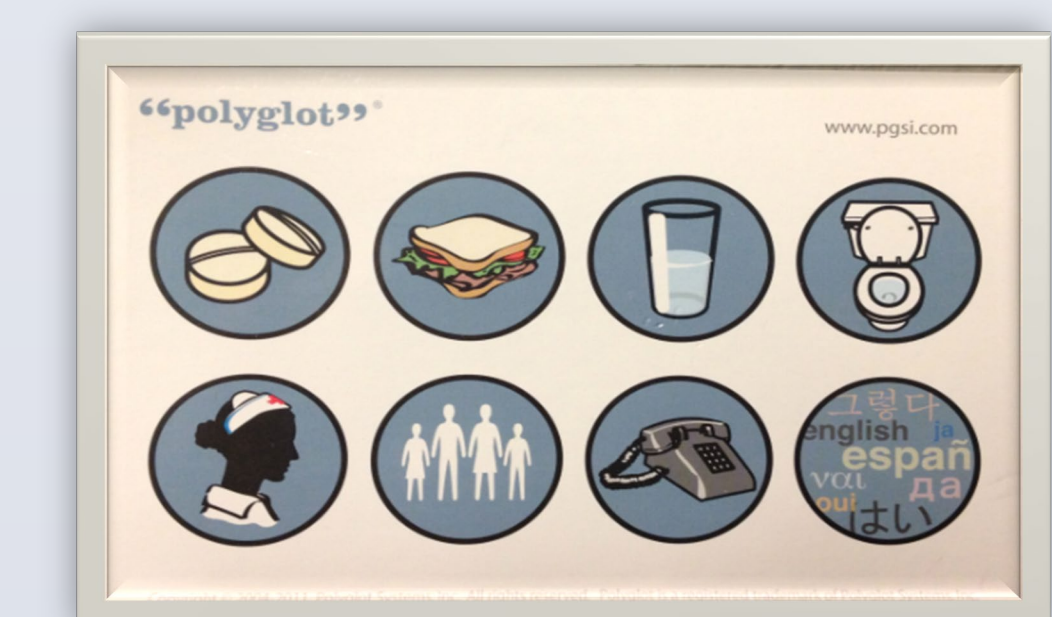
10. What could 5W/hospital do better to meet your communication needs?

Having more interpreters, staff that speak their language, everything was good, be more attentive, the service was excellent, bring an interpreter sooner.

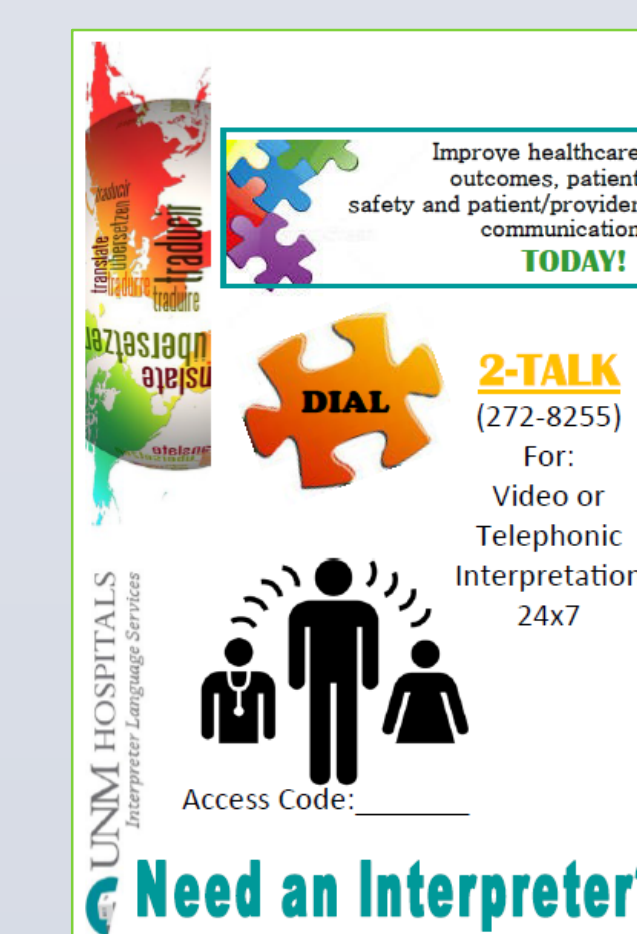
## Conclusions

The most important results found in this study is that interpreter services and equipment use has improved after educational sessions provided by the Interpreter Language Services. The survey results also demonstrate that after our education interventions there was a significant increase in the percent of LEP patients that felt that their communication needs were always met. The surveys of healthcare workers indicate that knowledge of interpreter equipment was very high before and after educational interventions for staff, and increased significantly after education for providers.

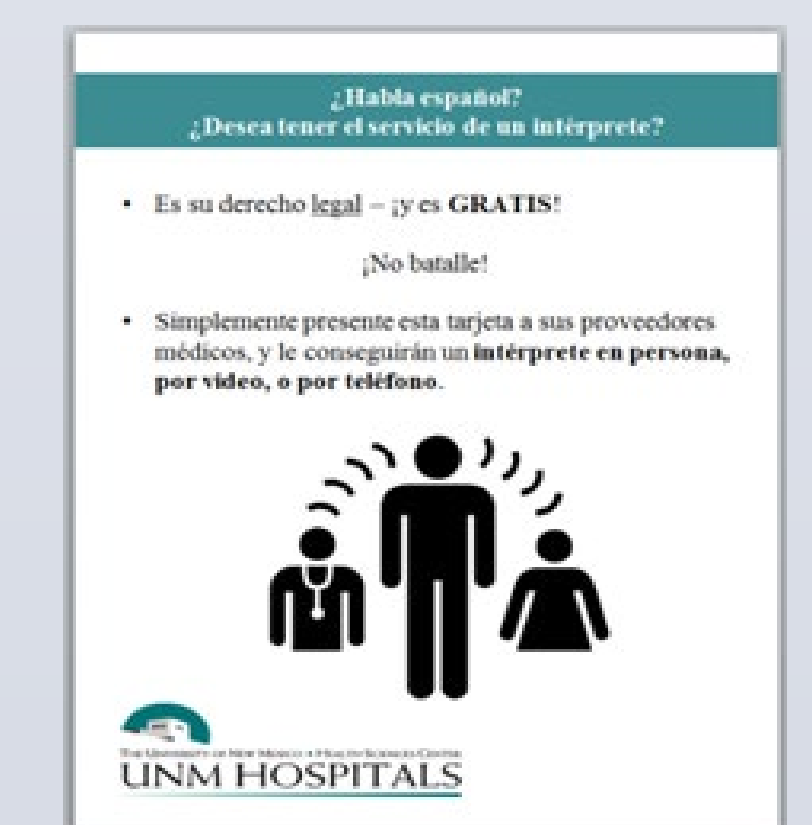
Although LEP patients and providers prefer an in-person interpreter, that may not always be feasible. Continued education for nursing staff and providers is necessary to meet the communication needs of LEP patients.



Polyglot Cards



Quick Reference Badge Cards



ISpeak Cards

## Acknowledgments

- University of New Mexico Interpreter Language Services
- University of New Mexico 5 West Leadership team and health care providers

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University of New Mexico Interpreter Language Services. Hospitals.unm.edu/language.