

December 2006

Florida Hospital's Quality Goals

1. Rank in the Top 10% of hospitals nationwide
2. Show ongoing cycles of improvement in all areas of patient care

Florida Hospital Quality Indicators Dashboard

Pneumonia Care	Heart Attack Care	Heart Failure Care	Infection Control	Patient Safety	Whole Person Care
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Patient Safety Indicator: Language Barriers

In English, the word "once" means "one time." In Spanish, "once" means "eleven" – a potential life or death mistake if you take your medication 11 times a day instead of just "once."

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that over 51 million Americans – or 19% – speak a language other than English at home. In Central Florida, the percentage is 25%.

"Limited English Proficiency" (LEP) patients are seen daily or weekly in 96% of US hospitals with 300 beds or more. Yet, over 70% of medical providers report that language barriers regularly interfere with patient care. LEP patients have a harder time explaining their symptoms, aren't always able to ask the right questions, and often guess at what they are being told. This result is that they:

- Are four times more likely to take the wrong dose of medication
- Are less able/likely to comply with their treatment
- Are more likely to be misdiagnosed
- Have more medical complications
- Are more likely to miss appointments if they do not speak the same language as their physician
- Receive less preventive care such as breast exams, mammograms and pap tests

Patient care is only part of the issue. Language barriers cost the US health system billions of dollars each year in:

- Unnecessary tests
- Preventable physician visits
- Preventable ER visits and hospitalizations

Language Services now mandated

Traditionally, when trained interpreters were not available at a hospital or other setting, family members, friends, staff or even strangers were sometimes asked to

A family traveled with their young son from Europe. The boy had cancer and needed specialized medical care.

The physician came into the exam room and found that the family spoke no English. They had brought an Aunt who spoke limited English.

The appointment lasted three times longer than usual. The physician wasn't sure if the Aunt understood the medical terminology or was correctly interpreting it. Several times, the Aunt and the parents seemed to be arguing.

The appointment ended with both sides uneasy.

interpret. Most of these “ad hoc” interpreters had no training in medical terminology. Often, a child was asked to interpret for a parent.

“It is not appropriate for an 8-year-old child to explain to his mother that she is very ill,” said Jean Aldridge, coordinator for Florida Hospital Interpreter Services. “And certainly, a mother cannot speak frankly with a child on culturally sensitive topics.”

Worse, ad hoc interpreters are far more likely to make translation errors. A Medical College of Wisconsin study found over 60% of ad hoc interpreter errors had potential clinical consequences. The errors were varied:

- 52% omitted an important piece of information
- 15% used non-existent words or phrases
- 13% substituted words
- 10% editorialized
- 8% added words or phrases

Interpreter Services improve care

The University of Washington Children's Hospital found that children whose parents did not request interpreters had twice the risk for complications. Conversely, those who did request an interpreter had no increased risk for serious medical events. In another pediatric study, researchers looked at the accuracy of non-trained interpreters and found an average of 31 translation mistakes per single patient encounter.

Adults have similar risks, especially in hospitals where staff members have no way to identify LEP patients before they arrive. They may not even recognize the language being spoken. Resources are available to help determine the language, but the process can take precious time.

What is Florida Hospital doing?

In 2000, the U.S. Civil Rights Office mandated that health and social agencies provide culturally competent language assistance 24 hours a day – at no cost to the patient. From that mandate came 14 standards for hospital linguistic services. The standards guide patient services, staff education, staff recruitment and patient-related materials.

At Florida Hospital, patients who need diagnostic tests or surgery can schedule their procedures in their native tongue by calling 1-877-746-4674. They can also request that an in-person interpreter be present for the procedure.

Emergency patients can dial “0” and ask to be connected to telephone translators. The telephone staff will identify the language and provide an interpreter. Emergency requests for the most common non-English spoken languages and sign language can usually be accommodated within an hour.

Translation Services at Florida Hospital include:

- Optimal Phone Interpreters (OPI): 24-hour telephone interpretation for 150 languages
- On-site trained interpreters (48-hour notice required)
- American Sign Language Services
- Tactile Interpreters for blind and deaf patients
- Language identification posters and resource handbooks to help staff (1) identify the language the patient is speaking and, (2) work with these patients more effectively.
- Translation of patient vital documents into Spanish, Haitian Creole, Brazilian Portuguese, and Vietnamese