Use of Certified Interpreters in Clinical Clerkships

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Why should professional interpreters be utilized?

- Professional interpreters are required by law at any institution receiving federal funding (Title VI of the Civil Right Act and the Executive order 13166) (Chen et al 2007).
  - communication (errors and comprehension)
  - utilization (shorter hospital stays and lower rates of re-admission for the same diagnoses)
  - clinical outcomes
  - satisfaction with care

Why shouldn’t students routinely serve as interpreters?

- Students who speak a second language, including some from populations underrepresented in medicine (UIM), are asked to serve as ad hoc interpreters for multiple patients with LEP even when they may not have the fluency or certification to do so (Vela et al 2016).
- Use of ad hoc interpreters has been demonstrated to compromise patient safety and patient care often by misinterpreting or omitting up to half of physician’s questions and committing errors of clinical significance (Flores et al 2003).
- While many medical schools deliver medical Spanish coursework, few provide certification exams to demonstrate appropriate fluency (Morales et al 2015). In one multi-institutional study, less than 3% of medical students providing interpretation services in clinical settings had passed a certification exam (Vela et al 2016).

What are recommended practices for interpreter use when working with students?

- Supervising faculty must teach and protect patients and students from medical and legal consequences and role model appropriate use of interpreters.
- Supervising faculty have the opportunity to teach both patients and students that LEP patients have a legal right to professional interpretation services (Vela et al 2016).
- Work with certified interpreters (available in person, via tele- or video-communication), when providing care for patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) instead of using students as ad-hoc interpreters.
- If students have undergone the certification process, students can volunteer to interpret for team patients (opt-in approach), but supervisors should take care not to ask students to interpret for multiple patients on a team due to concern that this may detract from their role as a clinical learner.
- Encourage all students to experience working with LEP patients and utilize interpretive services.
How do you effectively work with a certified interpreter?

1. Request an interpreter for the visit

2. Make necessary arrangements for working with the patient by having pictograms or translated materials prepared pre-visit if possible.

3. Discuss the content of the visit with the interpreter before the patient arrives.

4. Allow for brief introductions of all parties to set up a trusting environment

5. Position provider, patient and interpreter in a triangle so all parties can see and hear one another.

6. Practice looking at patient while speaking and pause often to allow interpreter to repeat messages. Allow patient to repeat back their understanding.

References:


