



## What Language Services Mean to Patients

While measuring the impact of language services on quality of care was at the core of the program, *Speaking Together: National Language Services Network*, data alone do not tell the full story. Participating sites also offered vivid descriptions of what having an interpreter in the hospital means to their patients. For example:

**At Phoenix Children's Hospital, about half of the patients seen in the Peritoneal Dialysis Clinic speak only Spanish or very limited English.** Justine Stropka, R.N., a nurse in the clinic described the experience of a 16-year-old patient and his mother, who both spoke only Spanish. The patient could not be discharged from the hospital until the patient and mother felt confident of being able to carry out the complex care procedures at home.

A specially assigned group of Spanish interpreters trained in peritoneal dialysis technical language assisted with more than 30 hours of instruction about using the peritoneal dialysis machine, adding medications, doing manual dialysis, giving shots, changing dressings and other procedures. Through this interpreted training, the boy and his mother gained the knowledge and confidence they needed.

When the interpreter accompanied the nurse for a home visit, the family demonstrated their understanding of the procedures. "I cannot imagine doing the home visit without an interpreter," Stropka said. "We love the interpreters and so do our families."

The mother agreed. "The interpreting staff helped me a lot," she said. "I am very thankful for the preparation that I received. My son kept saying, 'Mom hurry up and learn so that I can go home.' I was able to understand the information that the nurses gave me. I am confident to take care of my son at home."

**At UMass Memorial Medical Center, a pregnant Ecuadorian patient was admitted to an inpatient unit with active tuberculosis.** Staff initially identified her language as Spanish and assigned a Spanish interpreter. The patient's compliance with treatment was minimal and Interpreter Services staff determined that her Spanish ability was, in fact, quite limited—rather, she spoke Quechua, an indigenous language.

The Interpreter Services Department was able to provide a Spanish and Quechua interpreter. "The interpreter also took on the role of culture broker and focused not just on the language but also on the patient's cultural beliefs," said Connie Camelo, director of Interpreter Services. "He shifted from being a conduit to an advocate. He used stories and

analogies to introduce foreign concepts to the patient. He made the doctors aware of the situation and the gaps in understanding.

"The patient was admitted for several months in isolation and we were able to provide culturally respectful care. The patient's understanding of her own medical condition resulted in a positive outcome. I can't imagine what would have happened if she didn't have this service."

**At Seattle Children's Hospital** staff saw the value of good interpretation when an interpreter was able to elicit information from a patient's mother about her concern for her other children. These children had been hanging out at the hospital since the mother was worried about leaving them home with their father who had been violent with her.

"We would never have gotten this information if the doctor had just gone in with broken Spanish," said Beth Ebel, M.D. "Often you don't know what you're getting into with medicine. If you don't know the nuances of the situation it can be a problem."