



## Telephone Interpretation Services Can Serve Hospitals Well

Many hospitals that were part of the program, *Speaking Together: National Language Services Network*, include telephone interpretation in their language services offerings. These are purchased services that allow a hospital to offer languages that only a small number of their patients require and to offer interpretation at any hour in any hospital location. As the project manager at the University of Michigan said: "We could just grab the phone when patients came in who spoke languages for which we don't have an interpreter."

Some examples include:

### "Just-in-Time" Interpretation

#### ***UMass Memorial Medical Center, Worcester, Mass.***

At UMass Memorial Medical Center, project staff worked to improve the quality and accessibility of telephone interpretation, which now represents 30 percent of total interpretation services.

"One of our mantras is that interpreter services have to be delivered 'just-in-time'," said Warren Ferguson, M.D., associate professor and vice chairman in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. "There are lot of competing demands for doctors and other health care workers. If a doctor is waiting for an interpreter and a family member is there and there are patients waiting, then the doctor will cut corners and use the family member. Decreasing the barriers to accessing telephone interpretation is very important. The system we had was very cumbersome."

Director of Interpreter Services Connie Camelo agreed. "Doctors are booked back-to-back and overbooked. The economic impact on them and on the clinics when interpreters get behind is great."

Through *Speaking Together*, UMass identified the gaps that prevent good telephone interpretation, upgrading equipment and giving clinics direct access to services. "We adapted to the needs of the doctors and every clinic's needs were assessed," said Camelo. "The increase in use of telephone interpretation is 900 percent and it continues to grow

without decreasing the use of face-to-face interpretation, which was the fear from many of our providers."

## **Communicating With Parents of Sick Children**

### ***Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center, Seattle***

Staff at Seattle Children's upgraded the phone interpreter system, equipping them with dedicated, double-headset phones in every patient room.

Sarah Rafton, M.S.W., from Children's Center for Diversity and Health Equity, noted that regular communication can be "particularly important with pediatrics. If you are trying to have daily communication with the parents in order to hear their important observations about clinical status, this is an additional safety check for that child."

A cancer care nurse said, "Phone interpretation is a quick and easy way to check in with a family, like asking if their child has pain. I use the phone to answer parents' questions about the care I'm giving or the plan for the day."

"There are times you know you need an interpreter and you go get them," said Beth Ebel, M.D., director of the Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center. "But there are many times when you don't know you will need one. That way you don't have to come back later. You can check right then."

## **Maintaining Privacy of Patients From Small Ethnic Communities**

### ***University of Michigan***

Using a telephone interpreter can be particularly beneficial when a patient is a member of a small ethnic community and might have some connection to the interpreter.

Connie Standiford, M.D., clinical associate professor in the Department of Internal Medicine, used the health system's new telephone interpretation service when she was at an off-site clinic meeting with a Chinese husband and wife. "I had no interpreter and couldn't have waited for an interpreter to come," said Standiford. "I remembered about the phone service. It was great. I spoke to them together and then had them in separate rooms for their exams. I walked between the two. I thought it was very respectful of the privacy of the patient. I could explain to each one what I was doing and it was more private than with someone [an interpreter] behind a curtain."