

# Quality Care for LEP Patients at a Rural Health Care Clinic

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## Introduction

Immigrants in Grays Harbor County and other rural areas are vulnerable populations. They have poor access to health insurance and primary care, language barriers, and lower satisfaction with their health care all part of the problem. The purpose of the project was to identify evidence based interventions to improve the health care for these patients at Summit Pacific Medical Center in Elma, WA.

- The foreign born population of the U.S. is 40 million
- 75% covered by health insurance (compared to 87% native born)
- 85% speaking a language other than English at home, and 10% not speaking English at all
- Immigrant and LEP patients do not have equal access to quality health care when compared to native born U.S. residents

## Objectives of the Project

- Improve the quality of care for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients at SPMC
- Improve inter-professional collaboration while promoting cultural competence throughout the SPMC health care system
- Conduct a literature review to determine what evidence based practice for improving care for LEP patients

## Synthesis of the Evidence

Two main areas of inquiry;

- What are the health disparities and specific needs of immigrants?
- What interventions can reduce these disparities and improve care?

The research is clear that immigrants are vulnerable because of lack of insurance, language barriers, lower income, and lack of education. While the problem is clearly defined, research into best practices addressing these needs are limited. There is not enough evidence to support cultural competence training as a way to directly improve patient outcomes, but evidence does support the use of appropriate language services.

Research shows a clear indication for using professional medical interpreters to improve the quality of care to LEP patients. The use of professional medical interpreters for all interactions with LEP Patients is evidence-based practice.

This led to the implementation of *Providing Safe & Effective Care for Patients with Limited English Proficiency* at SPMC in Fall, 2014

## Interventions

- The educational program *Providing Safe & Effective Care for Patients with Limited English Proficiency* was created by the Disparity Solution Center at Massachusetts General Hospital and implemented at SPMC over several months. This consisted of three online modules and a live class and focuses on the importance of using certified medical interpreters and how to work with them most effectively.
- Post education interviews with employees
- Grant funding for two bilingual staff members to become certified medical interpreters
- Purchase of a new computer based interpreter program, InDemand, for the entire hospital system
- Inclusion of cultural competence and language appropriate care into SPMC strategic plan based on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines, National standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS)
- Interviews with staff, presenting at executive and management team meetings, and presenting recommendations for systems level improvement at SPMC

## Conclusions

- Implemented a program to educate SPMC employees about the importance of professional interpreters.
- Evidence does support the use of professional medical interpreters to improve outcomes for LEP patients.
- Evidence also indicates the need for systems and organizational change to improve care.
- This capstone started as the implementation of an education program, but evolved into a plan to improve the quality of care to LEP patients throughout the entire system.
- Provided employee education and improving the access of patients to professional interpreters through a new interpreter system that is much easier to use and more effective
- LEP patients will receive a higher quality of care at Summit Pacific

## Five Key References

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