



## TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING: ACROSS LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients are faced with language barriers that undermine their ability to understand information given by healthcare providers as well as instructions on prescriptions and medication bottles, appointment slips, medical education brochures, doctor's directions, and consent forms. They experience more difficulty (than other patients) processing information necessary to care for themselves and others.

### Tips to Identify a Patient's Preferred Language

- Ask the patient for their preferred spoken and written language.
- Display a poster of common languages spoken by patients; ask them to point to their language of preference.

Post information relative to the availability of interpreter services.

Make available and encourage patients to carry "I speak..." or "Language ID" cards.

(Note: Many phone interpreter companies provide language posters and cards at no charge.)

### Tips to Document Patient Language Needs

For all Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients, document preferred language in paper and/or electronic medical records.

- Post color stickers on the patient's chart to flag when an interpreter is needed.  
(e.g. Orange =Spanish, Yellow=Vietnamese, Green=Russian).

### Tips to Assessing which Type of Interpreter to Use

- Telephone interpreter services are easily accessed and available for short conversations or unusual language requests.
- Face-to-face interpreters provide the best communication for sensitive, legal or long communications.
- Trained bilingual staff provides consistent patient interactions for a large number of patients.
- For reliable patient communication, avoid using minors and family members.

### Tips to Overcome Language Barriers

<b>Use Simple Words</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid jargon and acronyms</li> <li>• Provide educational material in the languages your patients read</li> <li>• Limit/avoid technical language</li> </ul>
<b>Speak Slowly</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not shout, articulate words completely</li> <li>• Use pictures, demonstrations, video or audiotapes to increase understanding</li> <li>• Give information in small chunks and verify comprehension before going on.</li> </ul>
<b>Repeat Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always confirm patient's understanding of the information - patient's logic may be different from yours</li> </ul>