

# Help Your Patients Who Speak Limited English

About 8% of people in the US are considered **limited English proficient (LEP)**.

These LEP populations face many challenges, such as lack of healthcare access and reduced health literacy...which can lead to misinformation, med adherence issues, and vaccine hesitancy.

Share these tips with your team to help them effectively communicate with patients who are LEP.

**Interpreting.** First, determine what language the patient speaks...simply by asking or using language identification cards.

Know your hospital's language assistance policies. Many have access to telephone interpretation services that can interpret 100 or more languages.

When using an interpreter, speak directly to the patient...not the interpreter. This shows you're giving the patient your full attention.

Don't rely on family and friends to interpret. Serious errors can occur when certain info is omitted, added, or substituted.

**Understanding.** Follow your pharmacy's policies for gathering patient info during a medication reconciliation...even if communication is difficult. Ask for patient name, date of birth, address, etc.

Avoid asking "yes" or "no" questions. Some patients will nod or say "yes" just to be polite...when they really don't understand what you're saying. Stick with asking open-ended questions.

Do a "chunk and check"...where you give the patient portions of info at a time...then assess their understanding. This will allow you to assess what the patient acknowledged...and fill in gaps as needed.

Consider using pictograms...to help get messages across visually.

**Educating.** If your computer system allows, ensure discharge paperwork and medication fact sheets are printed in the patient's language.

Stay alert for words that can easily be misinterpreted. For example, "once" means "eleven" in Spanish...and it could cause big problems if a patient takes a medication, such as warfarin, eleven times a day instead of just once a day.

Unpack our toolbox, *Overcoming Patient Communication Challenges*. And dive into our CE, *Effective Patient Communication*, for best practices on speaking with patients.

## Key References:

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