



Guide for Providers: Language Barriers

1.8 million Torontonians speak a language other than English or French at home¹

¹Statistics Canada 2011 Census

Discharge is a time where language barriers are likely to have the highest risk²

²Ref: 2012 Disparities Solution Center publication 'Improving Patient Safety for Patients with Limited English Proficiency'

HOW DO I KNOW THAT MY PATIENT HAS A LANGUAGE BARRIER?

Language Barriers can be obvious, and for some, less obvious. You can learn the language and still not know it well, especially when discussing sensitive issues or during a stressful period such as hospitalization. It is suggested that you ask all patients their language preference.

WHAT DO I DO IF MY PATIENT PREFERS TO BE SERVED IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE?

Use a professional interpreter as often as possible. The use of family as interpreters is discouraged as confidentiality is breached and family members have little training in medical interpretation. Common errors when family members are used include omissions, additions and substitutions resulting in misunderstandings and misdiagnoses. Family should still be available for patient support.

WHAT ARE SOME TOOLS I CAN USE WHEN USING A PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER?

- 1 Ask only one question at a time.
- 2 Speaking slowly makes the interpreter's job more difficult. Pause instead.
- 3 Ask the patient to speak to you directly and speak directly to the patient.
- 4 A professional interpreter will use the first person in interpreting
- 5 A professional interpreter will avoid paraphrasing or answering for the patient.
- 6 Feel free to interrupt if you sense the interpreter is not being complete.
- 7 You can ask the interpreter to point out any cultural misunderstandings that may arise.
- 8 Don't assume that inability to speak English = a lack of education.