

# migrant-friendly hospitals

## Methods to identify and assess the language needs of the patient

### Procedures

#### a) Two-part question:

- 1) "Do you speak a language other than [insert local language] at home? Answer: "yes" or "no" - > if yes, then
- 2) "How well do you speak [insert local language]? Answer: "very well", "well", "not well" or "not at all" -> if answer is anything but "very well", the patient is likely to benefit from interpreter services.

If patients don't state that they speak the local language "very well", identify their preferred language (i.e. that in which she or he feels most comfortable in a clinical encounter) and note it in the patient's clinical record.

#### b) In more pressured situations (e.g. A&E): Open-ended questions:

- 1) "What language do you speak at home?" or "What is your preferred language?"
- 2) Follow-up questions to determine whether the patient would prefer or benefit from an interpreter for medical communication

**Tip: Do not ask closed-ended questions such as "Do you speak English?".** They may result in misleading responses as people frequently overestimate their fluency levels.

#### c) Patient self-identification methods to facilitate access to language assistance:

##### ▪ Interactive language maps

Patients can identify their country of origin on a map. Clicking on the country, or the national flag, will give providers an overview of which languages and dialects are commonly spoken in the country in question. The maps are also a useful tool for providers if they know the patient's country of origin, but cannot identify her or his language through an interview. Language maps are available at <http://www.massgeneral.org/interpreters/cultural.asp>.

- **Welcome cards**, printed in many different languages, instructing patients to bring the card to the information desk if they need assistance. On the reverse side are instructions on how to contact interpreter services.

- **Wallet-size cards with the patient's primary language written in [insert local language]**, as well as instructions on how to reach an interpreter for that language. Patients can present the card in relevant clinical consultations, as well as during subsequent visits to the hospital, to identify their need for language assistance.

- **Staff badges in different languages**, saying "I speak...! May I help?" in the appropriate language. Colour-code badges for low-literacy patients, e.g. Turkish is always purple, Vietnamese is always green. Patients can readily identify bilingual staff members for assistance if they are lost or need directions.

- **Language identification charts** can help literate foreign language patients with requesting interpreter services. One such chart is organised into a "patient-visitor-column" which lists the question "Do you speak....?" in various languages, with a matching column indicating the name of the language in [insert local language]. Use demographic profiles of the communities in the hospital's catchment area to determine which languages to include.

(Approaches developed by Massachusetts General Hospital and the Queensland Interpreter Card Programme, More info at: Torres, B. Best Practice Recommendations for Hospital-Based Interpreter Services, <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/bhqm/2bestpra.pdf>, p.7

The Queensland Interpreter Card: <http://www2.premiers.qld.gov.au/about/mag/html/gp/qic.htm>)

## Identifying patients' language needs