

Improving Time to Provider Seen in the Emergency Department for Non-English Speaking Patients

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Of just over 100,000 encounters at the Hennepin County Emergency Department (ED) between April 2024 to April 2025, 22,634 of those encounters involved patients who did not speak English as their first language. Studies have shown that Limited English Proficiency (LEP) can impact patients' access to health care. A study found that for LEP clinic visits, those that involved a trained on-site interpreter did not show a significant difference in mean exam time and visit length, when compared to clinic visits when phone interpreters or nonprofessional interpreters were used. One barrier to the use of interpreter services in the ED, is the perceived time it takes and the labor that is associated with getting a professional interpreter. Some of the most critical diagnoses in Emergency Medicine require prompt assessment including heart attacks, stroke, and sepsis to name a few. An analysis of the 102,444 encounters at Hennepin ED found that on average, it takes 80 minutes for an English speaking patient to be assessed by a provider. This is in contrast to the top four languages other than English spoken at Hennepin (Spanish, Somali, Oromo and Amharic) which take approximately 105 minutes, 98 minutes, 118 minutes and 124 minutes respectively before a patient is seen by a provider. Furthermore, the average length of stay for Somali, Oromo and Amharic are approximately 20 minutes or longer than those of English speaking patients. A root cause analysis was done which showed several factors contributing to this time difference. From a people standpoint, there is a limited number of in-person interpreters as well as providers who speak the same language as these patients. The methods used to speak to patients include in-person interpreter services, iPad interpreter services, and phone services. From an equipment standpoint, there are a limited number of iPad interpreters in the department and the only way to reach an in-person interpreter is through an Epic order. Furthermore, the Hennepin County Medical Center is a busy Level 1 Trauma center with limited time for providers to see a large volume of patients. On top of that, this institution is a safety net hospital where many underserved patients go for health care; this includes patients who are non-English speaking. The aim of this project is to decrease the time it takes for patients who speak the top 4 languages at Hennepin other than English by 10 minutes over the next 12 months. In order to achieve this goal, all providers in the ED will need to receive training on how to use interpreter services. Furthermore, the number of in-person interpreters and iPad interpreters in the department will also need to be increased. The average times between the pre- and post- intervention groups will be statistically analyzed to see if there is improvement in time until a non-English speaking patient is seen by a provider.