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WHAT A DIFFERENCE AN INTERPRETER CAN MAKE: HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCES OF UNINSURED WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

PERSONAL STORIES FROM THE FIELD

1. A 22 year-old Latino woman was scheduled for a Caesarian section at a hospital in Memphis, where she resides and works at a local restaurant. However, when her water broke early, she went to the hospital emergency room. No interpretation was provided. A nurse's assistant assumed she had wet her pants and sent her out of the hospital. Confused and uncertain, the woman left the hospital and contacted her obstetrician. Eight hours later, she was admitted back to the hospital, where her obstetrician performed an emergency Caesarian section. *[From information supplied by Latino Memphis]*
2. A mother on birth control had to take her 10 year old daughter to the Public Health Clinic to translate how to use the birth control pills. Daughter explained that she had to help her mother because the clinic would not have a translator available. *[From information supplied by Sister Rachel Sena, O.P., Director of Maya Ministry Family Literacy Program]*
3. A relative, trying to interpret for a patient who could not speak English, misinterpreted. Based on misunderstanding the patient, the doctor scheduled the patient for surgery. On the morning of the procedure, a trained interpreter conveyed information that showed the surgery was not only unnecessary but also likely to be harmful to the patient. *[From information provided by the National Health Law Program]*
4. A Haitian woman in her 70's was seen at a health center several times complaining of "gaz." She spoke Haitian Creole and providers thought she was talking about gas and prescribed Mylanta. No tests were done. She was describing general stomach pains that were moving around (a Creole speaker would have understood that's what "gaz" refers to). By the time she was diagnosed with stomach cancer it was too late to treat it and the woman died. *[From information supplied by interpreter at Cambridge Health Alliance]*

5. After going to an Alexandria hospital with a severe stomach ache, a Hispanic man in Virginia was prescribed three medicines. After taking all three medicines at once, he experienced a severe reaction and went to the emergency room. An interpreter was found who explained in Spanish that he was not supposed to take all three at once. *(From information provided by Tenants & Workers Support Committee in Alexandria, VA)*
6. We visited a mother in her home and she told us she felt very guilty for over medicating her child who was at that time in a coma. The mother was illiterate, spoke very little Spanish and no English. She had taken her three children to the public health clinic and was given medication with instructions on how to medicate each of her sick children. She tried to memorize the instructions. Her child eventually came out of the coma. *[From information supplied by Sister Rachel Sena, O.P., Director of Maya Ministry Family Literacy Program]*
7. A Cambodian woman went to the emergency room at a Fresno hospital and they discharged her to a mental health provider. This provider transported her to a facility in Modesto, an hour & half away. No one spoke her language (Hmong). She thought she was being kidnapped. *[From information provided by Central California Legal Services]*
8. A Virginia woman went to a hospital at 7 p.m. No interpreter was available. At 11 p.m., her blood was drawn. By 3 a.m., when no one had spoken to her to explain her condition or the delay, she left. She paid for emergency services at a private doctor. *(From information provided by Tenants & Workers Support Committee in Alexandria, VA)*
9. On a home visit, we met a mom who needed help. She had applied an external cream in her child's mouth causing blisters to form. The mother did not speak Spanish or English and was illiterate. She spoke Q'anjob'al, a Mayan language. We asked to see the medication and translated the instructions for her. *[From information supplied by Sister Rachel Sena, O.P., Director of Maya Ministry Family Literacy Program]*
10. We have been asked to come with families for translation skills. My personal experience when accompanying a family is observing children translating for their adult parents; women paying \$50 for an adult private translator who will translate maybe 5 minutes. Many of the poor who have no transportation to and from public health clinics find people willing to take them to the clinic in a car or van. The driver is also a self-appointed translator who runs from room to room translating and filling out medical history forms. *[From information supplied by Sister Rachel Sena, O.P., Director of Maya Ministry Family Literacy Program]*