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Tips for Documenting Interpretive Services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Patients: Notating the Provision or the Refusal of Interpretive Services

California law requires that health plans and insurers offer free interpreter services to both LEP members and health care providers and also ensure that the interpreters are professionally trained and are versed in medical terminology and health care benefits.

- **Documenting refusal of interpretive services** in the medical record not only protects you and your practice, it also ensures consistency when your medical records are monitored through site reviews/audits by contracted health plans to ensure adequacy of the plan's Language Assistance Program.

  o It is preferable to use professionally trained interpreters and to document the use of the interpreter in the patient's medical record.

  o If the patient was offered an interpreter and refused the service, it is important to note that refusal in the medical record for that visit.

  o Although using a family member or friend to interpret should be discouraged, if the patient insists on using a family member or friend, it is extremely important to document this in the medical record, especially if the chosen interpreter is a minor.

    ▪ Smart Practice Tip: Consider offering a telephonic interpreter in addition to the family member/friend to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

  o For all LEP patients, it is a best practice to document the patient's preferred language in paper and/or electronic medical records (EMR) in the manner that best fits your practice flow.*

    ▪ For a paper record, one way to do this is to post color stickers on patient's chart to flag when an interpreter is needed. (For example: Orange = Spanish, Yellow = Vietnamese, Green = Russian)*

    ▪ For EMRs, contact your IT department to determine the best method of advising all health care team members of a preferred spoken language.

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* Source: Industry Collaboration Effort (ICE) Tips for Communicating Across Language Barriers; **www.iceforhealth.org**

** The universal symbol for interpretive services at the top left of this document is from Hablamos Juntos, a Robert Wood Johnson funded project found at: **http://www.hablamosjuntos.org/signage/symbols/default.using_symbols.asp#bpw**