Impact of medical interpreters on understanding and satisfaction of non-Hebrew speaking Arab families in the pediatric emergency room at Hadassah Mt Scopus

Background: In Hadassah Mt Scopus hospital, a large number of the patients (more than 60%) are Arabs who do not speak Hebrew. On the other hand the majority of physicians do not speak Arabic (more than 80%). This situation create communication difficulties which cause misunderstanding of the medical information given to the patients, medical mistakes and reduced family satisfaction.

The purpose: The purpose of the study was to check the impact of medical interpreters on family satisfaction and their comprehension regarding the medical condition of their child. We checked the knowledge of the parents about their child's situation and the prescribed medical regimen.

Methods: In the pediatric emergency room at Hadassah Mt. Scopus Hospital, Hebrew – Arabic interpreters were temporary employed for some days of the week. The understanding and satisfaction of parents who visit the ER (n=194) were evaluated by inquiry sheet when the children discharged from the ER, with and without the presence of interpreters (n=95) and (n=99). Further more we compared between the information which the families got and the information in the discharge letter. We checked the level of understanding of the medical and drugs information by 10 questions which checked the knowledge about the diagnosis, the follow up which the child needs, in which situations he has to return to ER., In children who received drugs we checked the knowledge of it's name, it's duration and it's dose.

Results: The presence of interpreter significantly improved the level of parental satisfaction with parents believing that they had greater involvement in medical decision-making (from 23% to 76%), had a greater understanding of what the physician told them (from 49% to 96%), increased comprehension of medical recommendations (from 40% to 95%) and that the medical staff was more responsive
(from 34% to 76%). In all these subcategories of family satisfaction, the p-value was < 0.001.

The presence of an interpreter also significantly improved the parents' knowledge about the diagnosis (from 78% to 96%), the required follow-up (from 34% to 86%), situations in which they had to return to the ER (from 38% to 72%), and the recommended dose and duration of the drug use (from 24% to 74%). The p-value < 0.001 for all these subcategories.

The improvement in these parameters was not influenced by demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, parent's level of education or the reason for arriving at ER. Furthermore, the level of the parent's Hebrew fluency didn't decrease the positive influence of the interpreter.

**Conclusions:** The presence of medical interpreters improves the communication between the medical staff and families not understanding Hebrew. Medical interpreters improved parental satisfaction and their comprehension regarding the treatment that they were receiving in the ER. Based on this study, it appears that the absence of interpreter may cause iatrogenesis and medical mistakes in drug use because of misunderstanding of non-Hebrew speaking Arab parents who receive recommendations in Hebrew. The positive influence of medical interpreters on the quality and safety of emergency room treatment of children, and as such, should be considered an essential element of medical care in a multi-cultural society.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**


