



ROLLING PLAINS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SWEETWATER, TX

December 2004

Executive Summary:

Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital serves a community that is approximately 20 percent Hispanic. However, significantly more than 20 percent of the hospital's patients are Hispanic due to higher incidences of chronic disease in the Hispanic population. The hospital strives to provide each of its Spanish-speaking patients with the same communication and health care experience that an English-speaking patient would receive. This is done not only through written and verbal translation services, but also by providing a bilingual pharmacy technician, offering videos in Spanish to complement a Hispanic-oriented television station, and airing Spanish promotional advertisements on the local Spanish radio station.

In addition to strengthening patient-provider communication, Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital offers a free diabetes clinic staffed by a full-time bilingual nurse. The nurse provides diabetes education, counseling, and support groups five days a week in both English and Spanish. The hospital also works closely with the public health department's prenatal care clinic.

Organization Size: 54 Beds

Program/Initiative Description:

Meeting the Communication Needs of the Hospital's Hispanic Patients: Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital has implemented a number of programs to meet the communication needs of its Hispanic patients. The organization translates all documentation and patient education materials into Spanish and has many bilingual staff members as well as Spanish translators available 24 hours a day. The translators are employees who have been trained to ensure their translation is accurate for health instructions. In addition to translation, the hospital offers a semester-long Medical-Spanish course specifically for health care providers.

The hospital also employs a bilingual pharmacy technician who helps translate and clarify instructions for outpatient preparation and patient needs. The pharmacy technician assists patients in understanding their drug information and also translates patient-specific information into Spanish.

In addition to ensuring strong patient-provider communication, Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital subscribes to a Spanish television channel for patients and has a variety of Spanish videos in its entertainment library. The hospital also performs its marketing and advertising in English and Spanish, airing its Spanish advertisements on the local Spanish radio station.

Community Programs Targeting Hispanic Health Care Needs: Physicians at Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital work closely with the prenatal clinic operated by the public health department. The services available and collaboration between the clinic and providers allow the hospital to receive very few unexpected drop-in mothers.

In addition, Rolling Plains Memorial Hospital hosts a free diabetic clinic. The clinic is staffed by a bilingual nurse. The nurse provides disease counseling and education, organizes support groups, and offers regular educational programs. Each of the

services is available in English or Spanish, and the nurse may be visited five days a week. The clinic allows uninsured and underinsured patients to learn about diabetes and how to manage their disease, and provides patients with an increased quality of life, as well as saving the hospital from the expense of high-cost, complex cases.

Establishment of Program/Initiative:

- Translators and Spanish written educational materials: Prior to 1994
- Bilingual Pharmacy Technologist: 1996
- Free Diabetes Clinic: 1999

Racial or Ethnic Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address:

Approximately 20 percent of the community's population is Hispanic, but closer to 40 percent of the hospital's patients are Hispanic due to their greater health care needs and higher rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes.

Major Objectives: To provide Spanish-speaking patients with the same type of information and communication access to hospital and health care professionals that any English-speaking patient would have

Significant Results: The hospital is confident the diabetic program and prenatal clinic are making a difference in patients' quality of life and saving money for the hospital, although it is difficult to measure these results.

External Partners in the Program/Initiative: When conducting health fairs or public health education programs, the hospital works closely with community organizations such as the public health department, the local school district, and the local technical college.

Limitations or Problems Encountered:

- Ensuring that program marketing reaches the target population, including promoting the diabetes and prenatal care clinics in written and verbal Spanish and in locations where Hispanic community members will be exposed to the information
- Ensuring that all potentially necessary documents are translated into Spanish, as there are many documents that are not used regularly and may be overlooked

Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date: \$40,000 annually for the diabetes clinic

Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program:

- Once a hospital breaks down barriers for non-English-speaking patients, it increases their comfort level and helps improve the quality of care provided.
- After deciding the hospital's target population, the organization should look internally to identify resident experts; the hospital may have individuals on staff with the necessary expertise who are willing to work toward the hospital's diversity goals.
- When document translation is done, compare the language translation to the Spanish spoken by the local Hispanic population; there may be different forms of Spanish spoken in different areas, and it is important that the documents are understandable for the local Hispanic population.
- Always have verbal translators available as an alternative for written documentation to assist patients who are not literate.

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