

Practice #8: A Nurse-Interpreter in a Halifax Hospital (IWK Health Centre) (Nova Scotia)

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This practice contributes to improving:

- Your organization's values and principles of: user safety;
- Interinstitutional coordination, liaison and integration mechanisms;
- Communication for service users;
- Community resources.

The organization implementing this practice: IWK Health Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The information contained in this file was mainly acquired from a telephone interview conducted on September 8, 2017, with Renette Amirault-Laing, Bilingual Services Coordinator at IWK Health Centre. It was complemented by documentary research, and these sources are cited as references.

Background

The IWK Health Centre (named after Izaak Walton Killam, the donor's late husband) is a children's hospital established in 1909 by local Halifax, Nova Scotia physicians. Its clientele largely consists of children, teenagers, and women from the Canadian maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia).¹ It currently employs almost 3,200 people.

Although active offer is not yet a consistent practice, the hospital strongly encourages it. Employees who can speak French wear lapel pins that say "Bonjour". However, not all services can rely on employees able to speak French. Twenty-five years ago, the Francophone community and health professionals felt a strong need to create the position of bilingual nurse-interpreter. The service having been met with great satisfaction among users, families and health professionals, it has been maintained since then. It is now a unionized position with a new title: Bilingual Services Coordinator.

Objectives

The practice aims to increase access to French-language services at the IWK Health Centre, by delivering direct services and by participating in service planning. The professional's role includes three components:

- Interpreting in French and supporting Francophone families who need to receive health information regarding their medical record in their own language;
- Coordinating administrative records and the translation of documents intended for Francophone users; and
- Maintaining contact with the Francophone and Acadian community.

¹ IWK Health Centre, Site portal: <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/corporate-home>

Features of the practice

The role of the Bilingual Services Coordinator comprises three components:

1. French-language interpretation: This service is provided to families who need to receive health information regarding their medical record in their own language. Support includes explanations of procedures and communication with the physician. The nurse-interpreter follows the user's path upon arrival, through treatments, and until the person's discharge. She is all at once a service coordinator, a liaison officer, and a support person, contingent on files to which she is assigned. She moves around the whole facility and is contacted by pager. She regularly visits users. She meets three to five families per day, which involves intensive follow-up, interpretation and support. Any French-speaking family admitted to IWK Health Centre can access the services provided by the nurse-interpreter. Users are mainly Acadian individuals.
2. Coordination of administrative records and translation: The professional acts as a liaison between various services regarding French language services. She also coordinates the transmission of letters to translators so they can be translated into the user's mother tongue.
3. Maintaining contact with the Francophone and Acadian community: The nurse-interpreter is part of the Santé en français network, leads and participates in awareness-raising activities and is on the board of the Nova Scotia Interpreting Services (NSIS).²

The position had been held by the same person for the last 25 years. Retired since January 2016, the former coordinator was replaced by a new nurse-interpreter, an Acadian from New Brunswick, who continues to support French-speaking families at IWK Health Centre.

It is relevant to mention the existence of two private interpretation services (Remote Interpretation Ontario-RIO Network³ and Nova Scotia Interpreting Services-NSIS), that families can call upon when the nurse-interpreter is unavailable. These are remote interpretation services. However, they do not allow for the physical presence of an interpreter that is so comforting for users and, consequently, they are less popular.

Challenges

Being the sole nurse-interpreter in a hospital involves a heavy workload. The challenge lies in being both a nurse and an interpreter. While this dual role enables knowledge of medical procedure terminology and any medical record issue; it is nevertheless a very demanding function. The professional spends more time than expected carrying out interpretation tasks, which leaves little time for other roles.

2 Nova Scotia Interpreting Services provides interpretation services in 40 languages. For more information, visit: <http://interpretingservices.ca>

3 The RIO Network (Remote Interpretation Ontario) is an interpretation service in 180 languages, available on a 24-hour/7-day basis. For more information, visit: <http://accessalliance.ca/programs-services/language-services/r-i-o-network-remote-interpretation-ontario/>

Analysis⁴

Why is this practice considered innovative?

This practice meets a need in the milieu. It derives from the need to ensure quality French-language services for IWK users. Telephone interpretation did not meet users' expectations; lack of visual contact was the main reason for their dissatisfaction.

The practice has been in place for 25 years and since it is not yet widespread it is considered innovative by the hospital's senior managers, healthcare providers, and users. It is recognized by the Société Santé en français networks that have an interest in initiatives that work well in linguistic minority contexts.

Emerging, promising or leading: A promising practice

- **Quality of evidence:** Although it has been in place for 25 years, this initiative has not been formally evaluated. It appears to have positive impacts on user safety: based on testimonials, it is assumed to decrease diagnostic and medical errors. An evaluation of the nurse-interpreter position is planned in the coming months.
- **Impact:** Any French-speaking family admitted to IWK Health Centre can access the services of the nurse-interpreter. However, we have no data on the number of families who actually use these services.
- **Applicability:** This practice is implemented at IWK Health Centre, in Nova Scotia. The initiative is well publicized within the institution and well used by the target population. There is no information available about other institutions or provinces having adopted this practice.
- **Transferability:** Since we have no information about other hospital facilities having implemented a similar initiative, we cannot comment about its transferability.

⁴ This analysis is based on criteria defined in the *Innovative Practices Evaluation Framework* designed by the Health Council of Canada, available at: https://healthcouncilcanada.ca/files/IP_Framework_Eng_final_1.pdf also outlined in Appendix 1.