Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Translating Discharge Instructions for Limited English-proficient Families: Strategies and Barriers

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BACKGROUND: Access to written hospital discharge instructions improves caregiver understanding and patient outcomes. However, nearly half of hospitals do not translate discharge instructions, and little is known about why. OBJECTIVES: To identify barriers to and potential strategies for translating children's hospital discharge instructions. METHODS: We conducted a mixed-methods, multimodal analysis. Data comprised closed- and open-ended responses to an online survey sent to Children's Hospital Association language services contacts (n = 31), an online environmental scan of Children's Hospital Association translation policies (n = 22), and county-level census data. We examined quantitative data using descriptive statistics and analyzed open-ended survey responses and written policies using inductive qualitative content analysis. RESULTS: Most survey respondents (81%) reported having a written translation policy at their hospital, and all reported translating a subset of hospital documents, for example, consent forms. Most but not all reported translating discharge instructions (74%). When asked how inpatient staff typically provide translated discharge instructions, most reported use of pretranslated documents (87%) or staff interpreters (81%). Reported barriers included difficulty translating uncommon languages, mismatched discharge and translation time frames, and inconsistent clinical staff use of translation services. Strategies to address barriers included document libraries, pretranslated electronic health record templates, staff-edited machine translations, and sight translation. Institutional policies differed regarding the appropriateness of allowing interpreters to assist with translation. Respondents agreed that machine translation should not be used alone. CONCLUSIONS: Children's hospitals experience similar operational and organizational barriers in providing language-concordant discharge instructions. Current strategies focus on translating standardized documents; collaboration and innovation may encourage provision of personalized documents.

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