

## Moving In-House Interpreters to the Right Patient at the Right Time

CHICAGO, IL—Healthcare call centers have certainly played an active role over the years in handling calls from people who speak languages other than English. Some call centers have staff members who speak other languages and calls can be moved to them for handling if appropriate. The sheer number of languages, however, greatly outnumbers the ability of call centers to handle everything in-house. So that's why outside interpretation companies have found a home in the healthcare call center world.

But what about the other side to the interpretation question. There are also needs for in-person interpreters for the inpatients and outpatients moving through our healthcare organizations.

In some cases this need can be so great that the department in charge of scheduling interpreters is overwhelmed. That's exactly what happened at Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center in Chicago prior to 2013. "Those calls came to me and it was non-stop," says Fabiola Romero, Supervisor of Language Services. "It was a whole job, just doing that."

Taking the calls was just the front end; staff members had to be assigned as well so patients could be taken care of. "I oversee a department with four part-time Spanish interpreters and one part-time Polish interpreter," she says. "I also have two Spanish and one Polish interpreter on the registry."

Starting that year, the hospital formed an arrangement with the

Beverly Hills, California-based American Health Connection for this offsite call center to handle all incoming in-person interpretation calls and then schedule the interpretation interactions. Any clinical professional in the hospital can make the call for an interpreter. Calls are answered by American Health Connection, which has three schedulers dedicated to the hospital, along with other clients.

Interpreters are scheduled and if the appointment is for that day, they are paged. If it is for another day, then the interpreter sees their schedule when they arrive at work on that day and can go to their appointment.

If there are no interpreters available, then the call center contacts Romero. It then becomes her job to sort it all out. If the new call fits into the emergency category, then she can ask the in-person interpreter to end their current session and go handle the emergency. In its place, she'll arrange to have an interpreter from an outside translation company to complete the interaction long distance.

On a typical day, the language services department handles 50 in-person interpretation requests. Its services, along with the American Health Connection schedulers, are available Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Interpretation services after-hours and weekends fall to the clinical staff to arrange with an outside translation company. ■

