

PHARMACY

Assessing Availability and Effectiveness of Pharmacy Spanish Interpreter Services: A Systematic Review

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The United States has a diverse population of patients who receive care from local clinics to larger health systems. Various interpreter services have been implemented to meet needs of Spanish-speaking individuals; however, availability and effectiveness need to be further assessed to determine if patients are receiving an adequate and acceptable quality of these services.

This 2021 systematic review explored literature on PubMed with search term “Spanish interpreter services,” yielding 97 results. The original search terms also included “effectiveness” and “availability,” but this combination of terms did not yield enough results to analyze. Review of six relevant publications identified the following factors impacting Spanish interpreter services: geographic areas, prescription labels, telephone interpreters, patient care outcomes, and patient perceptions and satisfaction. While these factors do not independently affect the quality of care, each factor was taken into consideration when evaluating the current state of interpreter services.

Spanish interpreter services in pharmacy practice settings are lacking in availability. However, before increasing availability, the quality of what is already available should be improved to serve the populations who are able to obtain those services. Furthermore, the terms “quality care” and “patient satisfaction” in these studies should have clearer definitions, and there should be further investigation of how these terms vary among each practice setting. Formulating more consistent definitions of “quality care” can be one of many ways the availability and effectiveness of pharmacies’ Spanish interpreter services can flourish.

Research advisor Cynthia Koh-Knox Sharp writes: “Ella demonstrated motivation to learn about interpreter pharmacy services. Throughout the project, she explored

various aspects of the main question and made independent efforts to speak to patients and pharmacy staff to better understand their perspectives. This was a good exercise in development of curiosity and application in real world.”

Table 1. Systematic review findings on availability and effectiveness of pharmacy Spanish interpreter services.

Factors impacting interpreter services	Noted information
Geographic areas	US states conducting research in AL, CA, CO, GA, NC, NE, NY, PA, RI, SC, TX, WA. More studies needed in other states as US population demographics change.
Spanish prescription labels	Provided to minimize medication errors caused by patient misunderstanding. Further studies needed to evaluate translation quality by dialect, connotation of words, and accuracy of translations.
Telephone interpreters	Commonly found in acute care settings. Need to develop policies to increase availability, integrate translation services in all patient care settings, and educate health care workers about these services.
Patient care outcomes	Type of interpreter used in service influenced quality of palliative care for cancer patients, specifically when discussing diagnosis, prognosis, management of end of life, and symptoms of pain and anxiety. Need to evaluate impact on patients with other disease states.
Patient perceptions	Patients more likely to seek care if they know they will have translation services available. Need demonstrated for expansion of Spanish medical terminology classes, Spanish-speaking staff, and marketing in Spanish.
Patient satisfaction	No universal instrument to evaluate whether or not limited English proficiency patients are satisfied with care received in community pharmacies. Need to evaluate cultural differences among Spanish-speaking populations to ensure accurate translations.