

Improving Language Access to Enhance Patient-Provider Communication



1

A Hispanic non-English-speaking White male in his 50s faced potential discharge for breaking Medicaid protocol due to lack of paperwork, causing him to lose coverage.

What could have been done differently?

The facility should have performed an early communication assessment to identify language interpreter services and used resources like “I speak” cards to help ensure the patient understood all the information being presented to him.

2

The facility called the Network to report the patient, and the Network requested documented interpreter service attempts. The facility had no such attempts to report and said the patient understood “enough English.”

What could have been done differently?

The facility could have attempted to use the language line and ensured that communication was performed in the patient’s preferred language to avoid miscommunication.

3

The facility performed a language assessment that revealed the patient’s primary language was Spanish.

What could have been done differently?

The facility could have implemented cultural competency training for staff, as well as introduced regular training sessions on the use of communication resources. This could have helped staff understand the importance of language assessments early in the patient intake process.

4

There was improved understanding between the patient and facility regarding Medicaid protocols, and the facility closed the case without implementing training or standards to prevent future incidents.

What could have been done differently?

Continuous improvement strategies to understand the effectiveness of communication initiatives and periodic reviews of policies and procedures could have been implemented to help avoid this situation from reoccurring.

Prioritizing proactive communication assessments for all patients upon first contact will help to reduce miscommunication. Additionally, implementing regular staff training on using communication resources and employing protocols to ensure documentation of language resources used can help improve patient-provider communication.