

No Hablo Inglés

Emergency Department Experiences of Spanish-Speaking Patients

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Purpose

To gain a better understanding of the experiences of Spanish-speaking only patients receiving care in the Emergency Department (ED).

Need For Study

- Joint Commission reports 65% of reported sentinel events involve issues related to communication
- Patients with limited English proficiency are at greater risk for serious adverse outcomes
- Little is known about the experiences of Spanish-speaking patients seeking care in the ED

Literature Review

Language barriers are a major obstacle for staff trying to effectively communicate in the fast-paced and often chaotic ED environment. Studies have shown that patient populations are growing more diverse. Difficulties with communication carry a significant health risk. Many studies have examined the effects of language barriers on patient experience and outcomes, but few have specifically targeted the experiences of Spanish-speaking patients in the ED.

Design

A qualitative design using a phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experience of Spanish-speaking only adult patients treated in the ED.

Setting

Stony Brook Emergency Department

- A 571-bed teaching medical center
- Level One Trauma Center in suburban northeastern United States
- Over 90,000 patient visits annually



Thematic Analysis

Using thematic coding based on Colaizzi's method, three overarching themes emerged:

Communication

“Well, for me the most important is that I communicate with the person what I need... for example there was a nurse that was asking me something ...I told her I could not understand and they tell me they don't speak Spanish. They take the blood pressure and then leave because they don't speak Spanish.” “They did not give me information of what the tests showed and what I had.” **Informant #10**

“(My daughter) she's always the one that ends up having to translate for me... sometimes I feel maybe she doesn't have the full understanding ... sometimes I ask her, 'Are you sure that's what they said... are you sure you told me everything they said?' And you know, I feel bad.” **Informant #4**

“They didn't say anything to me. They spoke with my daughter-in-law. I don't know what they told her...They didn't explain anything, they just took blood.” **Informant #11**

Wait times

“There was no one that could speak Spanish. It was very difficult to wait and wait for someone who could understand me...I was having pain and nausea...I was feeling really bad...they told me to sit down they would take care of me soon...she told me to sit down and wait until she could help...she was taking care of people that were sicker than I.” **Informant #4**

“They assisted me right away , I didn't wait too long it was fast.” **Informant #12**

“...If you don't speak English they leave you until they find somebody that speaks Spanish.” **Informant #6**

Patient satisfaction

“I like this hospital much better, I like it better than the ones near where I live.” **Informant #12**

“What I like the most is the attention I received.” “I didn't like when they put me outside in a corner...to wait for a room upstairs...I was alone.” **Informant #11**

“They should have someone there constantly who can speak Spanish well.” **Informant #4**

“I like this hospital...in other hospitals...they do not give you an interpreter...only in this hospital they give an interpreter...they can explain to me what I don't understand.” **Informant #12**

“There was a nurse that brought in an interpreter...I liked it because I could understand.” **Informant #10**

Sample

A purposive sample of 22 adult patients was obtained with 12 interviews completed.

Demographic Data	Number	Percent
Total Participants	12	100
Male/Female	4/8	33/67
Age		
18-24	2	17
25-40	5	42
41-55	4	33
56-70	1	8
71 or more	0	0
Education		
Grammar School	8	67
High School or equivalent	4	33
College	0	0
Marital Status		
Divorced or Widowed	0	0
Married	7	58
Separated	1	8
Single	4	33
How well do you speak English?		
Very well	0	0
Well	0	0
Not well	4	33
Not at all	8	67
I consider myself...		
South or Central American	3	25
El Salvadorian	4	33
Dominican	2	17
Ecuadorian	3	25

Method

- IRB and Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects approved
- A demographic form was completed by the patient after consent was obtained
- Face-to-face interviews were conducted within 24 hours for patients admitted to the hospital from the ED
- Patients discharged directly from the ED were interviewed via telephone within 24 hours after discharge
- Interviews were conducted by an ED research nurse who spoke Spanish or used a hospital-approved real-time language-assistance-device
- Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim by a professional bilingual transcriptionist

Future Studies

- Replicate study with other non-English-speaking patients
- Replicate study with English-speaking patients only
- Utilize in-person medically trained interpreters only