

# Interpreter services critical for emergency care

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(HealthDay)—Emergency department interpreters are vital to quality

care, according to an article published in the October issue of the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*.

Jay M. Brenner, M.D., from the State University of New York Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, and colleagues write that about 8 percent of the U.S. population older than 5 years has limited English proficiency. This [language barrier](#) can compromise care during a [medical emergency](#). Yet interpreter services may be underutilized because of a lack of hospital resources, a lack of trained and available personnel, or a lack of guidelines for emergency health care providers in a specific hospital or state.

The authors make several suggestions to improve language services in the emergency department. First, they suggest improving physician education on the use of interpreters. In addition, they recommend increasing community engagement to empower local residents to know their rights before they have an emergency. They also recommend offering a professional interpreter if doing so is practical when a patient has limited English proficiency or a hearing impairment; choosing the modality of interpretation—in-person, video, or telephone—that best fits the situation; and allowing use of an ad hoc interpreter only if the patient prefers it or a professional interpreter is impractical because the emergency is so extreme.

"Using trained interpreters has been shown to lower readmissions and limits the possibility of patient misunderstanding, physician misdiagnosis or mistreatment," Brenner said in a statement.

**More information:** [Abstract/Full Text \(subscription or payment may be required\)](#)

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