

Introduction

The Multi-Language Health History Project began as an initiative of the University of the Pacific Dental School (UOP) to address the needs of patients and dentists who do not speak the same language.

The United States Census 2000 reports that the number of people reporting birth in another country exceeds 8,500,000. Other demographic information indicates that 32 million people in the United States speak a language other than English in their homes. This diversity in ethnicity, culture and language enriches our lives, but it also adds a challenge to communicating important health information that is needed for the safe provision of dental care.

The University of the Pacific Dental School uses a thorough health history that is divided into sections related to medical signs and symptoms, diagnosed diseases, specific medical treatments and medications that may influence the diagnosis of oral diseases and/or modify dental therapy. The most current English version of the health history has been used at the University of the Pacific for over 15 years. As the diversity of their patient population increased, UOP realized that they needed to have the health history translated into multiple languages.

The health history was translated, keeping the same question numbering sequence. Thereby, a dentist who speaks English and is caring for a patient who doesn't, can ask the patient to complete the health history in his or her own language. The dentist then compares the English health history to the patient's translated health history, scanning the translated version for "yes" responses. When a "yes" is found, the dentist is able to look at the question number and match it to the question number on the English version. For example, the dentist would know that a "yes" response to question 34 on the non-English version is the same as question 34 on the English version and relates to high blood pressure. For that matter a Chinese speaking doctor could also use the multi-language health history with an English speaking patient and have the same cross-referenced information. A dentist who speaks Spanish could use the multi-language health history with a patient who speaks French. With the uniform health history question sequence these health history translations can serve patients and doctors all around the world.

The MetLife Dental Advisory Council, which oversees quality initiatives at MetLife, was looking at the issue of dentists who did not have health histories available for patients who spoke other languages. Dr. Jon Glenn, of Newport Beach, California, one of the practicing dentists on the Dental Advisory Council and a University of the Pacific graduate, recalled the Multi-Language Health History project. With the assistance of Dr. James Kennedy, chairman of the Dental Advisory Council, an agreement was reached for MetLife Dental Care to fund translations of additional languages. UOP, with the assistance of the California Dental Association, had already translated the health history into ten languages. Ten additional languages were identified by members of the MetLife Dental Advisory Council and employers who have selected MetLife as the dental benefit plan for their employees. Additional languages will be added in response to cultural competency assessments by MetLife and by the American Dental Education Association which is contacting Associate and Assistant Deans at US and Canadian dental schools to determine what other languages would be helpful to dentists. The translations are done by Transcend, a Davis, California company specializing in translations services. The company also authenticates (medical legally certifying that they are correct) the translations.

MetLife will make the multi-language health histories available to the more than 50,000 dentists who participate in its programs. The histories will also be available to dentists who visit the University of the Pacific Web site.

We believe that this project will improve future education and enhance the quality of oral health care, while at the same time acknowledging and respecting the diversity and cultural heritage of the patients we serve.

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