

Bonjour  
Hello

# WRHA FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES RESEARCH TIDBITS

Issue 1

## LANGUAGE & HEALTH

Language is a key factor to the safety of clients and patients. Several studies have indeed demonstrated the numerous risks that could result in not taking into account the language and linguistic barriers in a health care context. Consequently, the ability to understand and be understood becomes essential to an efficient relationship between the health care professional and the patient. So at the center of quality health care is the health care professional's ability to help, provide advice to, refer, and educate patients (FCFA, 2001). Access to health services in a person's language is in itself much more than the mere respect of that user's culture. The primary focus of quality health care is to ensure that patients can easily communicate with health professionals and understand what is happening to them (*Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, 2008*).

Bonjour Hello  
Manitoba

## DID YOU KNOW?

LeSon and Gershwin (1996) have found that patients with language barriers (*defined as an inability to speak English*) were more than 17 times more likely to be intubated than patients with the same characteristics who were fluent in English.

Source: (LeSon and Gershwin, 1996, quoted by Bowen, 2000)

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A Wirthlin Worldwide 2002 RWJF Survey found that one in five respondents have gone without care when needed due to language barriers.

## QUALITY & SAFETY

## FACTS & FIGURES

- ▶ 11% of Francophones living in MB do not have a regular family physician;
- ▶ 40% of Francophones in MB have difficulty receiving health services in the minority language (French);
- ▶ 67% of Francophones in MB find it important to receive health services in the minority language (French);
- ▶ 65% of Francophones in MB feel comfortable requesting health services in the minority language (French);
- ▶ Francophone seniors have longer median wait times (*13.2 weeks compared to 8.0 weeks*) to be admitted into a personal care home (PCH)

## WHY DO WE NEED SERVICES IN FRENCH?

**The development of bilingual capacity serves to mitigate the risks posed by language barriers with respect to the accessibility, quality, effectiveness and safety of health care and social services.**

## THE ACCESSIBILITY ADVANTAGE

“Language barriers make it challenging for patients to obtain the care they’re entitled to.” This is a direct quote from leading American medical expert Alexander R. Green, MD, Harvard Medical School, at the 3rd Annual Convention of Société Santé en français in February 2007. Canadian research also speaks loudly. In a study published by the University of Ottawa, researchers Louise Bouchard and Martin Desmeules revealed that members of Canada’s minority Francophone and Anglophone communities are in poorer health than the majority population. The researchers noted that communication problems between doctors and patients from linguistic minorities are more frequent.

## THE QUALITY ADVANTAGE

According to many experts, delivery of health care services in a patient’s language is a question of quality of care and risk management. Research has found that delivery of services in a patient’s maternal tongue has many advantages:

- Evaluation of a patient’s state of health is more accurate;
- Access to health care services, specifically to health promotion and disease prevention activities is improved;
- Treatment allows for greater interaction, which helps improve the therapeutic relationship and leads to more positive health outcomes;
- Patients understand their treatment plan better and are more likely to follow it;
- Patients are also more satisfied;
- The quality of care they receive is better, and;
- Risk management problems linked to service delivery become far less common.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS ADVANTAGE

Another literature review, this one by Health Nexus Santé which specializes in health promotion, confirms that the inability of organizations and professionals to adequately communicate in the user’s language leads to negative outcomes, i.e.:

- Increased consultation time;
- Decreased quality of services where good communication is essential;
- Overuse of emergency services; and
- Greater dissatisfaction with the level and quality of care received.

## THE SAFETY ADVANTAGE

The inability to communicate adequately in the user’s language in matters of health care also raises serious safety concerns including:

- Increased chance of error in diagnosis or treatment;
- Decrease in the reliability of treatments.

Other analyses have shown that language barriers directly influence issues of informed consent and information privacy for health, both of which have extensive legal implications.

## QUOTES & NOTES

"We clinicians are better educated and more scientific than ever before, but we have a great failing: we sometimes do not communicate effectively with our patients or with their families." (PA Tumulty, 1970)

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"Language has been described as medicine's most essential technology – its principle instrument for conducting its work (Jackson, 1998). It has been observed that without language, the work of a physician and veterinarian would be nearly identical." (Clark, 1983)

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"There are many steps in the process where things can go wrong. At each step, language barriers can lead to miscommunication. The end result is poor quality care." (Alexander R. Green, MD, MPH, Harvard Medical School)

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According to a study lead by Lee and his team (1998), patients who did not speak the same language as their provider had a 70% greater chance of being admitted to hospital than patients who did.

## RISKS

As a whole, the information available allows us to conclude the language barrier is linked to the following:

- ▶ Decreased initial access to health care;
- ▶ Tendency to delay care or to convince patients to avoid intermediate care;
- ▶ Reduced use of preventive care;
- ▶ Delay or lack of follow-up in treatments;
- ▶ Misunderstanding of diagnosis or treatment;
- ▶ Low level of patient compliance and adherence to treatments;
- ▶ Increased number of useless and poorly targeted hospitalizations;
- ▶ Increased number of diagnostic tests;
- ▶ Increased number of diagnostic errors and treatments;
- ▶ Inadequate management of chronic illnesses;
- ▶ Increased costs;
- ▶ Impact on the quality of care where good communication is essential;
- ▶ Decreased ability of health care professionals to meet their ethical obligations, and;
- ▶ Increased occurrence of critical incidents, namely after-effects and mortalities due to professional malpractice.

## ADVANTAGES OF FRENCH SERVICES

A review of the literature demonstrates that providing services in a client's first language has the following benefits:

- ▶ Improves the accuracy of health assessment;
- ▶ Improves access to health services, particularly health promotion and disease prevention activities;
- ▶ Treatment received enables interpersonal interaction, thus enhancing the therapeutic relationship leading to more positive clinical outcomes;
- ▶ The client has a better understanding of the treatment plan and is more likely to adhere to it;
- ▶ Client satisfaction improves;
- ▶ Quality of care provided improves, and;
- ▶ Risk management issues in service delivery are reduced.

## OUR COMMITMENT

The Winnipeg Health Region and all its service providers aim to:

- ▶ Improve access to health services in French, including primary health care;
- ▶ Ensure there are an appropriate number of organizations able to provide health services in French, consistent with Ministry standards;
- ▶ Ensure an adequate distribution of health professionals who are able to provide care in French;
- ▶ Provide information and resources in French;
- ▶ Respond to issues of interest and concern;
- ▶ Focus on the Active Offer of services in French;
- ▶ Increase staff awareness about needs of the French-speaking community;
- ▶ Collaborate with Francophone community representatives, and;
- ▶ Facilitate changes to improve the quality of services provided.



## RESOURCES

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority French Language Services mandate is:

To assist the WRHA in promoting and providing health services in French in accordance with its French Language Services policies, the Government of Manitoba French Language Services Policy, and regulations established under the legislation governing the Regional Health Authorities of Manitoba.

### VIDEO - The importance of Active Offer



### VIDEO - What is an Active Offer and why is it so important?



## CONTACT US

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