



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

PHSA supports BC multicultural communities by providing access to health care services in their own language

Provincial Language Service helps Island's Vietnamese/Asian/South Asian residents

Vancouver, BC – Vancouver Island's Vietnamese community is among the many multicultural BC communities now benefiting from health care services in their native languages thanks to the Provincial Health Services Authority's (PHSA) Provincial Language Service's (PLS) innovative approach to providing interpreting services.

PLS offers health care professionals round-the-clock access to interpreting services in more than 100 languages, including Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi, with the ease of a phone call. Created in 2003 as an expansion of a successful hospital-oriented service based at BC Children's Hospital and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, PLS last year handled approximately 20,000 requests for services.

The professional language and cross-cultural consultation service also makes interpreters available on-site across the province, and provides comprehensive document translation services. PLS' services are specifically designed for a health care environment so that complex medical information and procedures can be communicated accurately and effectively to patients.

"At a time when BC's population is becoming increasingly diverse, PLS makes it easy for health care providers to communicate with non-English-speaking patients. Equal access to health care services is only a phone call away," said Suzanne Barclay, PLS director.

"PLS has grown to meet the needs of a greater variety of health services in the province," added Barclay. "The telephone interpreting service has been especially well-received."

Margaret Griffith-Cochrane, a public health nurse in the Comox Valley, says that PLS' interpreting services were especially valuable during a new baby visit with a young Vietnamese mother. Newly immigrated to Canada, the Vietnamese woman didn't speak any English, didn't have a telephone, and didn't understand the community health system.

"I was pleased with how quickly and easily I was able to access a PLS interpreter who came with me to the client's house. The client was welcoming but, understandably, a little cautious. But thanks to the help of the PLS interpreter, she really warmed up to us as the visit went on, and invited us back the next week to follow up and weigh the baby," said Griffith-Cochrane.

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“When the PLS interpreter and I returned the following week, the client was much more comfortable and even began to ask her own personal questions. An important value-add of the PLS service is that it empowers non-English-speaking people to make informed decisions about their health care,” said Griffith-Cochrane.

“Through the interpreter, I was able to link the client to a local multicultural group and a neighbourhood community moms’ group. New immigrant moms are often isolated and at risk of post-partum depression or early discontinuation of breast-feeding because they are away from their support system. When the client joined one of the community groups I recommended, it was the first time she’d been out of the house in four weeks,” added Griffith-Cochrane.

“By providing access to interpreters skilled in medical terminology and culturally sensitive interpersonal relations, PLS has become an invaluable part of the patient and client care process, serving to bridge gaps in communication to provide information and knowledge that are necessary for optimal care,” said Dr. Doug Cochrane, PHSA VP medical affairs and quality.

Apart from the most important benefits of helping non-English-speaking patients gain access to health services, Barclay says that PLS helps create efficiencies to support a sustainable health care system.

“Because patients are better able to understand their health care providers, they are less likely to return for clarification. Less time is spent in consultation, diagnosis and treatment, and patients are more likely to comply with treatment, especially if that treatment information is presented to them in a way that is culturally sensitive.

“Ultimately, the efficiencies created by the use of interpreters through a centrally-managed health language service results in a more streamlined, cost-efficient service that benefits British Columbians as a whole. We are pleased to extend our program throughout the province to other health authorities,” said Barclay.

PLS services are accessed by health care professionals, not directly by patients. For more information about PLS, call 604.875.3402 or 1.877.BCTALKS, or go to: <http://www.phsa.ca/pls>.

PHSA plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians.

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