



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

75% of Provincial Language Service requests for Chinese/Punjabi interpreters

Vancouver, BC – The largest Chinese and Punjabi-speaking populations in Canada are 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."

Mary Spencer, a clinical nurse specialist in cardiac sciences at BC Children's Hospital, recalls how PLS' services may have been critical in optimizing the care of a young patient. Due to a language barrier, a non-English-speaking family had misunderstood a prescription for their child's medication and mistakenly stopped administering it after one week -- even though it was supposed to be continued.

"Once we got a PLS interpreter, we were able to communicate more effectively, and the child was started back on her medication," said Spencer.

Spencer also recalls another child who had open heart surgery a few days after birth. "Each day, a PLS interpreter came to communicate between the parents and the doctors and nurses involved in their son's care. And each day, we could see the

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parents' anxiety decrease as they understood how he was progressing.”

“Without PLS’ help, families may rely on other family members to interpret vital information. The information may not be interpreted correctly, or may be filtered to protect the recipient. Also, medical information is confidential. Having access to this service helps families avoid uncomfortable situations such as having to share private information,” added Spencer.

“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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