

# The Need to Ensure Effective Communication in Medicare and Medicaid



# The International Medical Interpreters Association and Language Line Services

- International Medical Interpreter Association (IMIA)
  - Founded in 1986, with over 2,000 members, IMIA is the oldest & largest medical interpreter association in the world. IMIA is the only national trade association of professional medical interpreter practitioners and is revered by medical interpreters as the preeminent experts in the medical interpreting field
- Language Line Services
  - Language Line Services, with over 5,000 employees is the world's founder and largest over the phone, video and on-site interpreter provider



# Medical Interpreters

- Professional medical interpreters are multilingual professionals who are trained to interpret in a manner which will provide safe communication between providers and patients in a diversity of healthcare situations, from 911 calls across the country to preventive and specialist care, in all languages and dialects
- According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of interpreters and translators is projected to increase 22 percent over the next decade, largely due to the need for interpreters and translators in health care
- A study on trained medical interpreters found that LEP patients with professional medical interpreters were 94% more likely to use primary care and 78% less likely to use an Emergency Department than English proficient patients, resulting in lower costs and more access to preventive care



# Impact of Using an Unqualified Medical Interpreter

- Inability to obtain accurate medical history, resulting in increased testing, greater potential for misdiagnosis, and greater risk of adverse events with resultant costs

*Example: the tragic case of Willie Ramirez who was left quadriplegic due to a misdiagnosis. The confusion was centered around the use of the Spanish word “intoxicado” which is not equivalent to the English word “intoxicated.” The law suit resulted in a \$71 million settlement*

- Poorer compliance with medical protocols by patients due to lack of understanding of medical orders
- A study on trained medical interpreters showed that in cases in which a Language barrier existed, mean test charges were significantly higher: \$145 versus \$104



# National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters

- Founded by Language Line Services and the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) in March of 2009 as an independent 501c3 non-profit entity, see [www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org](http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org)
- Established a rigorous national certification program
- Plans to provide rigorous credentials for all languages and dialects to ensure safe communication
- Externally [statistically validated](#) and reliable testing methodology
- State of Oregon has recognized Spanish Certification and provided grant to expand oral exam into five additional languages



# Our Efforts Recognized by the HHS Disparities Action Plan/Stakeholder Strategy

- The U.S. Health and Human Services' National Stakeholder Strategy for Achieving Health Equity highlighted the National Board of Certification of Medical Interpreters as a data source to help achieve the goal of improved cultural and linguistic competency
- The Stakeholder Strategy called for an increase in the number of certified medical interpreters and encouraged reimbursement for medical interpreting services
- The related HHS Disparities Action Plan called for the promotion of the healthcare interpreting profession as “an essential component of the healthcare workforce to improve access and quality of care for people with limited English proficiency”



# Need for Medicare and Medicaid Reimbursement

- 43 million Americans do not speak the same language as their physician
- Patients that understand their illnesses and medical regimens, such as taking their prescription medications properly and chronic disease management, have better health outcomes
- A study found that hospital readmissions could be reduced by up to 12% by improving language services when admitting and discharging LEP patients, and providing follow-up care
- Health care providers have indicated that cost is the major obstacle to properly accommodating their LEP patients
- Providing Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for qualified medical interpreters will reduce costs, better ensure patient safety and improve quality care through effective communication



# Proposed Demonstration Project to Promote Access for Medicare and Medicaid Beneficiaries with Limited English Proficiency

- Demonstration to Promote Access for LEP Medicare Beneficiaries by Providing Reimbursement for Medical Interpreters
  - In the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, H.R. 3962, The Affordable Health Care for America Act proposed the authorization of \$16 million per year of the demonstration to reimburse providers for providing language services in multiple provider settings
  - At least 24, 3-year grants to eligible Medicare service providers to improve communication between providers and LEP beneficiaries
  - Required the Secretary to evaluate the demonstration program and make recommendations on the expansion of such services to the entire Medicare program

