University of Virginia Health System

Video Remote Interpretation Efficiencies

T he University of Virginia (UVA) Health System is a 604-bed, academic, Level I Trauma Center located in Charlottesville, Virginia. The Health System is comprised of the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library, the University Physicians Group, and the UVA Medical Center and provides inpatient and outpatient care, patient education, and medical research and education. The UVA Medical Center is known for its cancer and heart centers and operates primary and specialty clinics throughout Central Virginia. The Medical Center's outstanding neurosurgery department also has patients from across the country. UVA physicians have been recognized for excellence by publications like U.S. News & World Report, Best Doctors in America, America's Top Doctors and more.

Community Profile

The UVA Health System is based in Charlottesville and operates satellite clinics throughout Virginia. The 2010 Census population for the City of Charlottesville was 43,435. 14.5% of the population speaks a language other than English at home and 3% of the population speaks Spanish.

Spanish – 34.1%
Chinese – 7.9%
French – 5.4%
Korean – 5.1%
German – 4.3%
Other Asian Lang. – 4.1%
Russian – 3.5%
Other – 35.5%
Total LEP Population

Languages Served in the Hospital: The most requested languages are Spanish, Russian, and American Sign Language.

Other Info on Limited English Proficiency (LEP): The International Rescue Committee (IRC), provides lifesaving support and assistance to people fleeing conflict and natural disasters. IRC is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia. As part of its mission, the IRC helps refugees to resettle in the United States and as a result, there are many refugees who reside in the Charlottesville area.
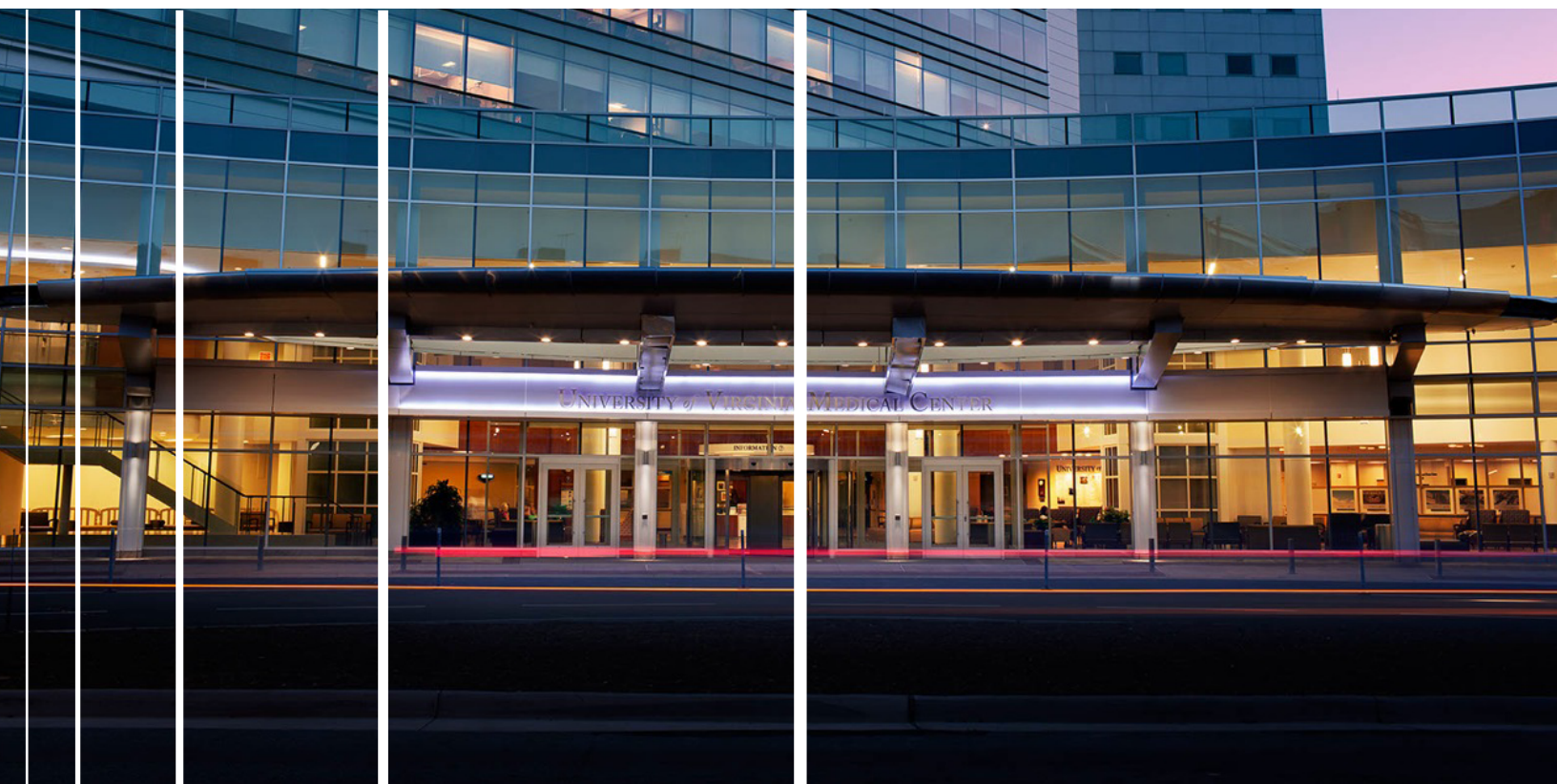
Language Services Program

The UVA Medical Center has provided professional language services in its hospitals and clinics for well over a decade. The Health System's commitment to eliminating language barriers reinforces effective communication between patients and providers to deliver the best healthcare services. The UVA Medical Center Language Services Department ensures access to necessary healthcare services for refugees and immigrants in their preferred language. Vickie Marsh, manager for the department says, "While we are mandated to provide language services, we also feel it is the right thing to do for our patients so they can be partners in receiving better healthcare."

Marsh manages the day-to-day operations of the department. She reports to Mary Ann Himes, Administrator of the Patient & Guest Services division.

Phone Interpretation

UVA Medical Center exclusively uses CyraCom for phone interpretation and has for over ten years.

Video Remote Interpretation

The Medical Center has used CyraCom for Video Remote Interpretation since June 2012. The Medical Center is one of CyraCom's top VRI users.

On-Site Interpretation

The Medical Center's Language Services is currently composed of nine Spanish interpreters, one part-time American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter, ASL contract interpreters, and one Russian contract interpreter.

> "UVA Medical Center uses CyraCom for the majority of our document translation needs."

"When the need surfaces, the Medical Center also utilizes the IRC to provide live interpreters in Chinese, Farsi, and other languages not provided by the department," says Vickie Marsh.

Document Translation

"UVA Medical Center uses CyraCom for the majority of our document translation needs," says Marsh.

Testing and Training

"During our hiring process, the Spanish interpreter candidates complete an internal oral and written competency assessment," Marsh says. "Individuals who pass the pre-test are scheduled with CyraCom to complete an in-depth language assessment."

Biggest Challenges in Serving the LEP Population

One of the biggest challenges the language department faces is controlling the rising costs of providing interpreter services. Healthcare providers often request a live interpreter for every encounter. Marsh and Himes have focused on educating providers about CyraCom telephone interpretation. Through staff education sessions, health care providers learn how to use the telephone services and how for certain appointments – such as a first-time cancer diagnosis – a live interpreter is warranted. By educating the healthcare providers, the language department is maintaining costs through matching the appropriate resource to the request for service.

Using Video Remote Interpretation

While the UVA Medical Center continues to employ on-site interpreters, the Language Services Program has implemented Video Remote Interpretation (VRI) technology, realizing positive results for patients. "When using contract interpreters," says Himes, "we pay for 30 minutes of travel time each way plus a full hour of interpreting. In essence we pay for two full hours even though they may only provide interpretation services for 20 minutes."

As a result, implementing CyraCom's VRI services has been both a time-saver and a cost-saver for UVA.

"The providers understand that this resource can be used right away so there's no delay in providing patient care," Marsh says.

"We only pay for actual interpreting time and not any additional travel time or unused minutes," says Himes.

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Right now UVA only uses VRI for Sign Language and the service has been very positively received by patients. "We had a patient who recently had surgery and wanted a 24/7 interpreter," says Marsh. "We were able to offer VRI as an alternative. This resulted in immediate interpreter services, without the provider having to wait for an interpreter to arrive."

The UVA language services department purchased a wheeled cart and four laptops for VRI use throughout the hospital. Instructions on how to use the VRI are attached to the cart and each laptop.

"We put our VRI laptops in our language department, and then we deliver it to the location based on patient need. We have one on wheels, and then we bought three laptops in July and installed RTLS to track them. The wheeled cart allows for 24/7 interpreter services. When a health care provider requests the VRI, it is delivered to the unit," says Marsh.

Physician Engagement With VRI

"While many providers say they want a live interpreter for every encounter, acceptance of the new technology varies depending on the provider," says Marsh. "Some health care providers don't think twice about it, especially if they know that they can get a sign language interpreter instantly."

VRI in the Stress Test Lab

Some hospital staff initially had doubts about the versatility of VRI. For example, the stress lab technicians felt strongly only live interpreters could work with their patients in the lab. They worried that if there were a bad outcome, such as a patient fainting, there would be too much confusion for the CyraCom Phones to work effectively.

"After some discussion, we finally agreed to run a practice test with VRI in the lab to see if it was a possible alternative for a live interpreter," continues Marsh. "While the technicians were pretty adamant before about only using live interpreters out of concern for patient safety, the practice test proved there were other alternatives that would work just as well."

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Benefits of CyraCom

Customer Satisfaction

"I inform health care providers if anyone has any concerns about CyraCom interpreters to let me know, and I've only received a couple of complaints. When I've received complaints, CyraCom does an investigation of the complaint and follows up with me," says Marsh.

Blue Phones

"We have CyraCom Blue Phones in every area of the hospital," says Marsh. "We're a big hospital with inpatient services and outpatient clinics, and every area has at least one phone. Facilities not located at the main hospital also have the blue CyraCom phones."

Staff Training

"Along with CyraCom's yearly in-service, the Language Services Department provides training whenever an inpatient or outpatient service receives a new CyraCom phone," says Marsh.

"We've had to educate staff on how not to keep CyraCom interpreters on hold while waiting for the provider to come to the patient's room. This practice was unnecessary, resulting in additional expenses and wasting the interpreter's time. Many providers mistakenly believe that it takes time to get an interpreter. Once the staff actually uses the CyraCom phone, they see that it's quick to get the interpreter - the average connection time for Spanish is 7 seconds – and as a result of continued education, they have been using it more consistently and efficiently."

Support Materials

"Stationed at each of our information desks, we have sign boards with different languages posted so patients and visitors can indicate the language needed," says Marsh.

Account Management

"Our Account Manager has been great. There have been multiple times I've needed a report at the last minute. I will send an email request, and have received the information I needed within minutes," says Marsh.

Above and Beyond

Tracking Language Preference

"Patient language preferences are documented and tracked in our patient registration system.

At registration, staff will verify the language need and confirm it in the system. When a patient schedules an appointment our scheduling system generates a notification of the patient's language need. The Language Department uses this list to arrange the most appropriate interpreter resource," says Marsh.

UVA Medical Center has developed an internal database to track services for patient appointments. The data facilitates to better allocate language resources. The language services department is working on developing a requesting tool using TeleTracking's ServiceTracking portal. The goal is to provide an easy way for healthcare providers to requests language resources whether using an on-site interpreters or the VRI equipment delivered to the room before the specific appointment.

"It's our goal to build some triage criteria so we can better utilize our resources," says Himes. "Some situations could use VRI instead of the phones. In these cases we can schedule the VRI for certain appointments and set-up the appropriate equipment in the room beforehand."

Telemedicine Technology

"We have initiated a pilot similar to the VRI with our on-site Spanish interpreters as well. Staff provides interpretation services while not at the bedside utilizing Telemedicine technology. An interpreter can sit at a desk with a camera and interpret from within the hospital. This technology provides our interpreters the ability to assist more patients and reduce travel time. The pilot's goal is to better utilize resources while maintaining quality services. Secondarily, staff are learning the technology options for providing live interpreter services. This technology will reduce wait times and unnecessary expense," says Marsh.

About CyraCom

In business for 25 years, CyraCom is a language services leader that provides interpretation and translation services to thousands of organizations across the US and worldwide.

Providing the best language services is a complex formula, and CyraCom considers every piece of the equation: quality, availability, security, speed and accessibility, and client support. Visit www.cyracom.com to learn more.

Contact CyraCom

Contact CyraCom today to discuss how we can improve your language services program.

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