



## **Posit on Mandated Medical Translation Services**

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**"A government mandate to provide medical interpreters for non-English speaking people is demeaning and counterproductive for patients, for medicine and for a coherent, cohesive society."**

AMONG 153 RESPONSES, 84 agreed, 64 disagreed, 5 expressed no opinion. While a majority of those who responded agreed with the posit, the majority of *commentators* felt mandated translation was appropriate, and not demeaning.

Posit statements are intended solely to encourage discourse among members, and do not reflect the opinions of the SSVMS Board, or editors. Edited comments appear below, while unedited comments can be viewed on-line at SSVMS.org.

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"There is no way to get an adequate hx from a patient that does not speak the same language as the provider without a qualified medical interpreter. Numerous errors are made when family members or other non-qualified persons are used. It is demeaning to NOT use a medical interpreter." - Dineen Greer, MD

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"Basically it's for one's self interest. One cannot provide any standard of care at all without a translator. However, the cost of, *e.g.*, Language Line, through AT&T is about \$3/minute, ought to be the responsibility of the patient." - Colin Paul Spears, MD

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"Interpreters insure a minimum level medical care is provided which is good health for all of society: consider the public health implications of poorly or untreated TB." - Sufen Chiu, MD

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"Your posit is worded in a 'too kind and benign manner'; just call it like it is: 'baloney.' Forego...have the patient bring an English speaking family member or friend." - Donald Hummel, MD

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"The mandate [is not] demeaning; however, it is counterproductive to a cohesive society... I consider myself an open-minded and tolerant individual, but I live in a country where the language we speak is English. If I move to France ...I will learn the language-French. There are studies which show when Hispanics do not learn English they are less likely to succeed... We need to encourage them to become part of the country they have joined without eliminating their own personal cultural differences." - J. Rabinovitz, MD

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"Considering how many languages there are, this is just simply impossible, mandate or no mandate." - Amy Black, MD

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"What is demeaning to non-English speaking patients is having a physician who ... uses a child or other family member to interpret. It often happens that intimate and private questions are asked that are too embarrassing to the patient to answer honestly in front of a child or family member; or the person being used does not understand the medical vocabulary and can't translate adequately... If we, as medical professionals, had risen to the challenge and begun using medical interpreters on our own there would not have been a need for a government mandate." - Glennah Trochet, MD

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"Kill this turkey by mandating the govern-ment pay full costs for the service." - Deane Hillsman, MD

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"A government mandate may be misguided, but it is not demeaning. ...Elected officials and regulators are ...trying to do the right thing in the context of our culture of over-entitlement, one of the most damaging social pathologies of our time. We demean ourselves as a society by feeling that we deserve the best of everything, at the expense of someone else." - Paul Phinney, MD

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"Not so much demeaning, as another example of the government interfering where it doesn't belong." - Richard Gray, Jr., MD

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"It may be expensive for doctors, but it's not demeaning to patients or medicine." - Ann Gerhardt, MD

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"I don't know that I would use such harsh words but this is truly counterproductive." - Elizabeth Mathews, MD

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"I [reject] strongly...any government mandate that interferes with patient/physician communications." - Paul Kelly, MD

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"Medical interpreters are BADLY needed and can only help to improve communication between patients and doctors." - Laura Kurek, MD

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"If I were in Russia, I would not dream of seeing the doctor without a friend or family member to translate for me." - Ron Rogers, MD

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"How can it be demeaning and counterproductive to provide an explanation about diagnosis and treatment to a patient through a interpreter? ...Call it a government mandate or just call it good medicine." - Jose Cueto, MD

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"Do these lawmakers ever think of how a solo practitioner is going to comply with this mandate? What happened to personal responsibility?" - Bill Au, MD

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"...the quality of service, the results of the treatment, the outcome, and ...the patient's satisfaction is ...greater ...where an interpreter ...[is] provided. ...patient understands what the treatment plans are with its pros and cons ...it is not an unfunded mandate anymore; funds are available and even Medi-Cal has a task force to establish the amount and mode of payment with their first meeting as early as next week." - Satya Chatterjee, MD

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"I believe nearly all government mandates regarding health care are misguided and unworkable. I would not have chosen the word demeaning but agree strongly with the idea that it would be counterproductive...." - Don Hause, MD

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"The concept is fine. The problem is that it is an unfunded mandate." - Edie Zusman, MD

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"A mandate isn't the right [way] to pursue this appropriate purpose...it's not demeaning or counterproductive - it's expensive and without reimbursement for it." - Jack Lewin, MD

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"An unfunded mandate that requires a physician to pay more for the interpreter than what the physician receives in reimbursement is unacceptable!" - Arjun Sharma, MD

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"A just and moral society is obligated to offer quality medical care to all who seek it. Only by ensuring that patients can communicate adequately with their healthcare providers can we fulfill this obligation." - Chris Gresens, MD

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"Who pays? The interpreter fees are more than medical reimbursement." - W. Randy Martin, MD

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"What's wrong with family? Who pays? MD office?" - John Young, MD

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"If patients do not speak English, a medical interpreter should be absolutely necessary and it should not be demeaning in any way...." - Dawn Sung, MSII

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"Cultural and language barriers have been identified as important contributing factors to

the quality of care. Without this mandate, many providers will not bother to provide interpretation services leading to errors, misunderstandings, and substandard care." - Olivia Kasirye, MD

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"I oppose such government mandates unless there is funding to cover the costs of this service. ...I don't think providing translators is either demeaning or counter-productive. ... Even if you believe that everyone coming to the USA should speak English, it is not going to happen overnight and we have to be currently prepared to take care of folks with no English ability." - Joanne Berkowitz, MD

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"There are already too many "government mandates." - Roseanne Pevek, MD

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"Quality and comprehensive medical care and treatment require precise communication... an interpreter negates the possible confusion that can and does occur.... When possible I request a family member. If this is not possible a certified interpreter always helps..., especially in urgent and emergency situations." - Michael Klein, MD

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"People need to take a certain amount of responsibility for themselves. For non English speakers to bring their own interpreters is not unreasonable." - J. Asling, MD

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"I agree. And (it) burdens providers with unfair cost." - Kuldip Sandhu, MD

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"This 'mandate' is racist ethnic vote pandering by the pro-illegal immigrant Democratic Party.... U.S. Citizenship "requires" a working knowledge of English.... (N)o other ethnic group ...has ever demanded interpreters. I suggest the Medical 'Profession' demand that Congress mandate that English is the language of governance of the United States. ...I have two immediate family members who are naturalized U.S. Citizens. They did it the legal way...My wife, when naturalized, was selected in her group of 1,000 to lead the Pledge of Allegiance because... she was the only one who could speak sufficient English to do the job. Thank God, the Irish speak English: I'd hate to have Gaelic interpreters federally mandated!" - Cleve Baker, MD

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"...Mandating interpreters for non-English-speaking patients is an unnecessary intrusion into the practice of medicine and decreases a cohesive society based on the ability of its citizens to communicate through a common language." - Rick Feldman/Wendy Forrest, MD

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"The use of interpreters for non-English speakers actually improves quality and efficiency of care in my experience. I disagree with a government mandate however...who will bear the cost of it all?" - Samuel Bartholomew, MD

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"I am horrified that people come to America then don't make any effort to speak English. ...(Yet)it is difficult for the physician AND the patient to complete the encounter satisfactorily if they cannot speak. It is a service for humanity that our government is trying to 'mandate'... full communication..." - Evalyn Horowitz, MD

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"I agree there is a need to communicate with the patient particularly about procedures and risks. However, to presume that the burden should be mandatory and fall solely on the practitioner disconnects the patient from their responsibility.... The mandate also places an unfair financial burden on the physician.... It will be a hindrance to encouraging bright young people to pursue medicine because of the onus to provide uncompensated care."" - Forrest Junod, MD

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"Let the government supply the interpereteers!" - Alan H. Galbreath, MD

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"...I HATE having to provide translators at my cost, primarily for Medi-Cal patients where I'm getting paid nothing already. Curious, since the OFFICIAL language of the State of California is English. It is about time that the CMA sued the State over this issue...." - Steve Polansky, MD

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"...Translation in extreme circumstances ...is reasonable; however, translation ...is probably counterproductive...non English speaking patients are allowed to continue

relying on translators and don't develop English as a second language. ...I support a system such as France uses, in which all citizens are required to learn French (English in our case)." - Travis Tollefson, MD

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"English is our language as a country and society. ...A 'mandate' is intrusive." - Greg Herrera, MD

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"Communication in medicine is basic. If we have admitted folks into this country who do not speak English we must be able to communicate with them when they come for medical care. My preference would be to have patients bring an interpreter. If not feasible, an interpreter should be provided. I see nothing demeaning here." - Irma West, MD

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"It is a no-brainer that interpreters are necessary to convey historical information to a physician from a non-English speaking patient.... It is up to the physician to assure the appropriate doctor-patient relationship.... If the interpreter is intrusive on this relationship, the physician should ...limit the interpreter's function to the essentials." - Charles Halstead, MD

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"If the government mandates that providers supply such a service, they should also provide reimbursement for the legislatively mandated services." - Seth Rosenthal, MD

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"There should be mandatory interpreters for quality and proper medical care." - Vong Lee, MD

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"Like all government mandates, [the government] should support the cost of the mandate." - Richard Meyers, MD

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