

# Breaking Down Language Barriers: The Benefits to Patients of Increasing Language Training for Residents – A Mini-Review

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## Abstract:

It is important to understand the significance of language training for residents to enhance communication between healthcare providers and patients. Language barriers can result in adverse outcomes like medical errors and reduced patient satisfaction. Effective language training can help residents to communicate better with patients, leading to improved patient-centered care, job satisfaction, and reduced burnout. However, language training programs often face challenges like funding constraints, time constraints, and finding qualified trainers. To overcome these obstacles, alternative funding sources and online language training can be implemented. Residency programs must prioritize language training to ensure that residents possess the skills required to communicate effectively with patients who speak different languages.

## Key Words:

Language training, Residency programs, Communication, Healthcare providers, Patients, Language barriers, Adverse effects, Medical errors, Patient satisfaction, Patient-centered care

## Introduction

According to 2018 data from the Center for Immigration Studies, over 67 million persons living within the United States speak a language other than English at home. This number has seen a significant increase since 1980, almost tripling in size [1]. The most widely spoken language after English is Spanish [1].

When language becomes a barrier to effective communication between healthcare providers and patients, it can have adverse effects on patient care and

Language training can help residents communicate more effectively with patients and their families, leading to improved patient-centered care. By being able to speak with patients in their own language, residents can better understand their medical history, concerns, and needs. This can also help to build trust between patients and healthcare providers, which can improve patient satisfaction and overall health outcomes. Additionally, language training can increase job satisfaction and reduce burnout among residents, as they are better equipped to communicate with their patients.

Effective language training can enhance healthcare accessibility for patients who do not speak English as their primary language. Improved communication between patients and healthcare providers increases the likelihood of patients seeking medical attention and adhering to treatment plans, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and patient satisfaction. However, many healthcare institutions rely on interpreter services which can be costly and time-consuming [2]. Despite recognizing the unequal care for patients with limited English proficiency due to underuse of professional interpreters, resident physicians often resort to using family members or their own language skills due to time constraints and convenience [3].

Common challenges in language training programs include a lack of funding, time constraints, and difficulty finding qualified language trainers. Strategies for overcoming these challenges include seeking alternative funding sources, implementing online language training, and partnering with community organizations to provide language training.

and outcomes. Patients who are unable to communicate their needs and concerns to their healthcare providers may be discouraged from seeking medical help or following treatment plans, which can result in unfavorable health outcomes. Additionally, language barriers may raise the chances of medical errors, misdiagnosis, and reduce patient satisfaction, quality of healthcare delivery, and patient safety [2].

Resident medical professionals have demonstrated a tendency to underutilize interpreter services, potentially due to a lack of available interpreters and time constraints. Consequently, they may resort to depending on their inadequate language abilities, inconveniencing their proficient colleagues, or altogether avoiding communication with Spanish-speaking families who possess limited proficiency in English [4,5].

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of language training in residency programs and how it can benefit both residents and patients.

### The Benefits of Increased Language Training

Valdini et al. carried out research that displayed noteworthy enhancements in Spanish proficiency after a 10-day immersion program [6]. Subsequently, the improvement continued with six months of reinforcement, which involved compulsory classes and regular practice with patients. The reinforcement consisted of mandatory 2-hour classes led by a certified Spanish language instructor three times a month for a year, as well as daily communication with patients. Ahead of clinic sessions, the Spanish teacher and the resident established communication objectives (such as utilizing the future tense when providing follow-up instructions), which they then practiced during real patient interactions.

Molina and Kasper are calling for medical schools to expand opportunities for medical language education and integrate it into the curriculum using established teaching methods, including content on health equity and standardized language assessments [7]. Their goal is to increase students' ability to communicate with patients who speak different languages, as this is crucial for ensuring accurate information exchange and patient safety. They stress that language-concordant healthcare providers can establish better rapport with patients, provide higher quality care, and enhance patient satisfaction.

### Conclusion

Language training in residency programs is crucial for improving communication between patients and healthcare providers, leading to better patient-centered care and improved health outcomes. Residency programs must prioritize language training to ensure that their residents are equipped with the necessary skills to communicate effectively with patients who speak different languages. Future research should focus on the effectiveness of language training programs and strategies for implementing and sustaining them in residency programs.

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