

LEP patients and call light communication

In hospitals across the United States, call light systems are used for patients to communicate directly with their health care providers. Communicating needs with English-speaking health care providers is difficult for limited English proficiency (LEP) patients who face language barriers. LEP patients are patients that do not speak English as their first language. The language barrier continues during these patients' hospital stay, affecting their participation in their care, and also affecting their transition from the hospital to their homes and other facilities. Despite a continuous increase of the LEP patient population in the United States, challenges in the quality of care received in health care systems continue.

Nurse call light systems remain the primary means for patients to initiate communication with their nurses and health care providers. Despite advancements in call light technology, nurse call systems continue to use analog speaker or phone based systems, which do not provide language access to LEP patients. In this research study, we studied call light use of hospitalized LEP patients, their communication with the call light and their health care providers, and their thoughts of a prototype of a new multilingual call light system called Eloquence™. Individual interviews were conducted with ten Spanish speaking patient participants. To our knowledge, no other studies exist on how LEP patients use the call light system, how it impacts their care, or how it can be made more helpful for this patient population.

After the interviews and data analysis, the following themes emerged: (1) Reasons for Call Light Use, (2) Challenges with Communication, (3) Patients Adaptation to Language Barriers, (4) Perceived Staff Responses to Call Light, and (5) Responses to the Eloquence™ Demonstration. These themes were compiled from the data collected from the LEP interviews, and included LEP patients' opinions and thoughts. Results from this study help shed light on the patient care experiences of LEP patients, and in turn can help guide health care providers and administrators in providing competent care for LEP patients.

For example, many LEP patients used different strategies to overcome language barriers (i.e., use of gestures or pointing) and were successful with simple requests, like asking for a glass of water. LEP patients became frustrated when more complex requests were needed to meet their needs, like understanding of their medical treatment(s), or their pain management. Some of the patients even felt that they are at fault for not being able to speak English, about making mistakes in their broken English or not being understood by their nurse and other healthcare providers, and these feelings led to frustration, fear, and worry. The demonstration of Eloquence™ however, delighted the LEP patients and provided them comfort because the call light model directly interprets their requests from Spanish to English to their nurses and healthcare providers!

It is essential for hospitals and health care providers to address the needs of LEP patients in order to improve patient and healthcare provider communication and therefore, health outcomes too. Our research study adds to knowledge of the challenges that LEP patients face in the hospital, as

well as the limited literature concerning LEP patients' use of call lights.

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