

WCM-Q research probes impact of language barriers on healthcare

Doha – June 6, 2017: Cultural competence and healthcare experts at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q) have published research results about the impact of language barriers on access to healthcare in Qatar’s highly diverse society.

WCM-Q researchers conducted interviews in the native language of Arabic, Hindi, Urdu and English-speaking patients at Hamad General Hospital outpatient clinics and discovered most had experienced some difficulty accessing care because of language barriers.

The research reveals English is the dominant language in hospitals, and a widespread belief that poor English skills present barriers to care, which even some Arabic speakers found frustrating. Hindi and Urdu speakers reported encountering language barriers more than Arabic and English speakers. Patients reported using informal communication strategies, such as communicating through untrained nurses or family members, non-verbal communication, and mixing languages.

The research was carried out in partnership with Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) and the University of Michigan and now been published in the highly regarded *Journal of Health Communication* in a paper titled ‘Patient Perspectives on Language Discordance During Healthcare Visits: Findings From the Extremely High-Density Multicultural State of Qatar’.

Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, Professor of Healthcare Policy and Research, Professor of Integrative Medicine, Senior Associate Dean for Population Health, Capacity Building and Student Affairs: “By learning to communicate with one another as effectively as possible we can maximize healthcare outcomes for all. We are very grateful to our associates at HMC for their extremely supportive attitude to this important piece of research.”

Huda Abdelrahim, a Senior Specialist of Cultural Competence in Healthcare in WCM-Q’s Institute for Population Health, co-principal investigator and the lead author of the paper said: “This project is a great example of collaborative efforts to investigate cross-cultural issues in healthcare. More studies like this can help inform policies to eliminate healthcare disparities, ensure patient safety and augment healthcare outcomes for diverse populations.”

Dr. Michael D. Fetters, The Principal investigator, Professor and Co-Director of Mixed Methods Research and Scholarship Program at the University of Michigan said: “In this paper we wanted to identify how language barriers diminish access to healthcare from the perspectives of patients themselves, as this information can be used to develop strategies to transcend linguistic differences and enhance healthcare access for all.”

The other co-principal investigators are Dr. Amal Khidir, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Maha Elnashar, Director of the Center for Cultural Competence in Healthcare both of WCM-Q, and Dr. Maya Hammoud, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, professor of Medical Education, and Amal Killawi, Qualitative Data Analyst both of the University of Michigan. Dr. Abdul Latif Al-Khal, Director of the



Department of Medical Education at HMC provided essential information and support to make the research possible.

These research findings will inform the importance and value of adopting interpretation services in healthcare institutions. The research Recommendations include raising awareness of the critical need for professional interpretation in Qatar healthcare, offering written information in multiple languages, adding patients' language preferences to their medical records, systematic reviewing of the current language services quality in Qatar hospitals and ensuring sustainability.

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About Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar

Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar is a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. It offers a comprehensive six-year medical program leading to the Cornell University M.D. degree with teaching by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty and by physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), Aspetar Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, the Primary Health Care Corporation, the Feto Maternal Center, and the Sidra Medical and Research Center who hold Weill Cornell appointments. Through its biomedical research program, WCM-Q is building a sustainable research community in Qatar while advancing basic science and clinical research. Through its medical college, WCM-Q seeks to provide the finest education possible for medical students, to improve health care both now and for future generations, and to provide high quality health care to the Qatari population.

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