

Francophone patients

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1 Despite a high level of bilingualism in the Francophone population, many are not comfortable speaking English in health care settings¹

Outside Quebec, more than 1 million people in Canada identify French as their first language.² However, the geographic distribution of French-speaking physicians does not match the distribution of the Francophone population, resulting in discordant linguistic care for many Francophones in health care settings.³

2 Physicians should identify Francophone patients in their practice

This can be done by asking patients what official language they are most comfortable using in a health care setting.^{2,3}

3 An active offer approach is essential when providing care to Francophone patients⁴

Active offer involves deliberately offering French-language services and proactively planning health services for Francophone patients before they have to request it.⁴ The availability of French language services should be clearly communicated and visible as Francophone patients are less likely to request services in French if no offer is made.^{1,5} All health care providers, whether or not they are bilingual, can perform active offer by having bilingual signage and translated health information and handouts, offering a bilingual greeting, or having a basic conversation in French (Appendix 1, available at www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.231799, tab-related-content).⁴

4 Non-French-speaking physicians should consider the use of interpreters when interacting with Francophone patients⁴

Formally trained interpreters can be accessed in person or virtually, and arrangements can be made through most hospitals. When such interpreters are not available, physicians should use caution when seeking other health professionals or patients' family members to assist with interpretation as this may increase risks to both the patient and the provider because of competing interests and the illusion that adequate communication is occurring.⁴

5 Physicians should strive to provide French-language continuity of care

Whenever possible, Francophone patients should be referred to French-speaking professionals for specialist or allied health care.^{1,3}

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"Five ways to support" articles provide strategies to help health care providers support people with health conditions or their families and caregivers in managing their conditions, receiving treatment or accessing care. These 300-word articles focus on the priorities and first-hand experiences of people living with or receiving treatment for the condition being described, or those of their caregivers. For more information, see <https://www.cmaj.ca/submit/guidelines> or contact PatientEngagement@cmaj.ca.