

Piercing Tribal Language Barriers in Health Communication

Introduction Language barriers are the main cause of miscommunication between healthcare providers and patients which could lead to misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment, and death. 46.8% of the linguistic minority patients' adverse events had a level of harm ranging from moderate temporary harm to death. Solutions have been developed to solve barriers between common foreign languages. However, the medical miscommunication caused by tribal languages has not been addressed and solved properly. In Thailand, there are about 3 million people in over 40 ethnic groups with distinct languages causing difficulties in obtaining patients' information and conveying messages back to the patients, so effective policies should be proposed. The past solution in Thailand relies on a group of volunteer interpreters enrolled by local hospitals which lacks unified and standardized regulation. Furthermore, the volunteers may not have been equipped with adequate skill set to practically deal with medical communication. To demolish the language barriers, the proper mode of interpretation must be inaugurated.

Methods A suggested policy would be to establish a center to function as a medium between certified interpreters and doctors. These interpreters will be recruited from each ethnic group and trained in a specifically designed program which will provide attendants with essential knowledge and skills required in medical translation. This includes understanding of patient confidentiality, suitable methods in delivering messages to the patients, for example breaking bad news, and basic comprehension in medical terms and procedures.

Key findings Corresponding to the suggested policies, this measure would possibly lead to the improvement of health communication

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