

Expanding Patient-Family Communication Through Text Translation

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Introduction: Effective communication is vital to patient- and family-centered care, particularly during surgical procedures. Families of patients with limited English proficiency often face barriers that increase anxiety and reduce equitable access to timely information.

Identification of the Problem: At Children's Hospital Colorado, perioperative text message updates generated by Epic were only available in English. Spanish-speaking families, therefore, did not receive the same quality or frequency of intraoperative updates, creating communication inequities during high-stress surgical events.

QI Question/Purpose of the Study: This project sought to improve intraoperative communication and health equity by implementing automated and custom text messages translated into Spanish. The aim was for 90% of Spanish-speaking families to receive automated text updates in their preferred language by May 2024, and to expand custom messaging capabilities by August 2024.

Methods:

- Phase I (November 2023) utilized Epic's embedded functionality to deliver automated text updates in Spanish based on perioperative event times.
- Phase II (August 2024) focused on developing translated "dot phrases" and click-box options for commonly used custom messages, standardizing communication across surgical teams. Education for perioperative nurses was provided via email, signage, and staff meetings.

Outcomes/Results:

- Automated text messaging for Spanish-speaking families increased from 0% to 97% system-wide within months of implementation and has sustained rates above 95%.
- Custom message utilization averages 66% across surgical areas, with variation from 56% to 98%.
- Families reported improved understanding, reduced anxiety, and greater trust in care teams.

Discussion: Delivering real-time updates in families' native language increased access to vital information, enhanced inclusivity, and promoted a more compassionate care environment. Variability in custom message use highlights the need for continued staff education and reinforcement.

Conclusion: Bilingual text messaging through Epic successfully improved equity in intraoperative communication for Spanish-speaking families.

Implications for perianesthesia nurses and future research: Perianesthesia nurses play a key role in supporting communication equity through consistent use of multilingual tools.

Expanding this initiative to include additional languages and refining staff education may further reduce disparities and strengthen family-centered care in the perioperative setting.