



Understanding the Problem

Research indicates that effective communication between patient and provider enhances the quality of care while reducing the risk of medical errors. Clear, unambiguous communication, so central to patient-provider dialogue, requires a common language and cultural sensitivity.

- 60% of Asian Americans were born overseas and most of them speak a language other than English*.
- 84% of Asian Americans, whose primary language is not English, said it was NOT easy to understand health care materials**.
- 52% of Asian Americans believe their doctor does not understand their background or cultural values**.

Goals and Rationale

While many health plans offer tools to help Asian members find providers who speak their language, few of these tools are actually offered in a language other than English.

The objective of this project was to offer Asian members an in-language provider directory that was relevant, reliable, accessible, and geographically customized.

To offer more relevant and reliable information, a clear distinction is made between the language capabilities of physicians versus medical staff.

The use of this new tool promotes better communication, which may have a legitimate, positive impact on the medical needs, and health, of the Asian community. It encourages provider trust and early disease prevention while reducing health care disparity and the risks of medical error***.

Sources:

* 2005 American Community Survey vs. Census 2000;

** 2001 Health Care Quality Survey, Commonwealth Fund;

*** L.A. Cooper et al, Ann Intern Med. 2003.

Asian In-Language Provider Directory

NCQA's 2007 Recognizing Innovation in Multicultural Health Care Award Winner

Intervention and Implementation

Primary and secondary research identified the need for in-language materials for Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese languages. These materials were designed to be implemented in certain geographic regions.

The support of UnitedHealthcare Executive Management was critical for organizational integration. The Asian American Markets team served as point on this project, managing major activities, including:

- Contracting with additional Asian American providers and hospitals
- Language capability verification
- Language and ethnic data integrity validation
- Multilingual translation and accuracy verification
- Web portal development for the in-language online provider directory
- Extensive advertising and promotion within Asian communities

By early 2006, all three identified Asian-language versions of the provider directories had been developed in California offering multiple formats. An Illinois version was successfully completed in late 2006, adding Japanese as a fourth language. The project is currently being expanded into Texas for 2007.

Three Methods of Evaluation

A multidimensional and systematic approach was used to evaluate the impact of this initiative and determine the potential for further improvements. The focus is primarily on three elements:

- Provider Network:** Identify changes in geographic provider network to maintain patient-to-provider ratios.
- Service Utilization:** Track member requests for printed versions and Web site traffic to determine consumer demand and utilization.
- Awareness and Promotion:** Multiple data points are reported quarterly, including community events, distribution of materials and direct advertisement results.



Impact of the Initiative

- More than 7,500 Asian providers have been contacted and individually verified based on language capabilities verification.
- Added an additional 900 Asian providers in the Los Angeles market.
- 91,250 in-language consumers have utilized both the online and hard copy versions.
- 80,000 pieces of information and marketing brochures have been distributed.

In addition to providing a meaningful tool to Asian Americans, this initiative helped to instill the sense of cultural, ethnic and linguistic sensitivity within our Fortune 50 health care company.

Sustainability and Transferability

This initiative has full corporate support and is under consideration for expansion in all 50 states, and in other Asian languages, as population and demographic needs are identified.

Executive sponsorship is a driving force behind the success of this initiative. There is a corporate-driven, high level of commitment to understanding diversity and building a better health care system. Our goal is to enhance patient-provider concordance at multiple contact points, which will help eliminate health care disparities, and provide a higher quality of health care.

With dedicated multicultural teams serving Asian American, African American and Latino American consumers, UnitedHealthcare is committed to providing Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS), and closing the gap of health care disparity due to ethnic, language and race differences.

