



# BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER: A LEGACY OF LANGUAGE SERVICES



EXCEPTIONAL CARE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

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# Boston Medical Basics: Caring for an Underserved Community

Boston Medical Center (BMC) is a 487-bed academic medical center located in Boston's historic South End and dedicated to providing "consistently excellent and accessible health services to all in need of care regardless of status or ability to pay – exceptional care, without exception."

"We take care of patients even if they don't have insurance," explained Elida Acuna-Martinez, BMC's Director of Interpreter Services. "We partner with 14 community health centers, and our MassHealth plan, BMC HealthNet, is the largest in the state."

BMC is the largest safety net hospital and the busiest trauma and emergency services center in New England. Underserved populations comprise 59% of BMC's patients, and 31% do not speak English as their primary language.

"Spanish is our most commonly-requested language – more than half of our interpreter encounters," Acuna-Martinez said. "After that, Haitian Creole and Cape Verdean represent 14% and 6%, respectively. We serve one of the largest refugee populations in the Boston area."



## BMC's work with their diverse community has yielded a number of awards and recognitions:



Named as Leader in The Human Rights Campaign Healthcare Equality Index (HEI) for meeting all criteria for LGBT patient-centered care.



Recognized by America's Essential Hospitals as one of six member hospitals for working to improve quality and population health in their community and beyond.



Received the annual Academic Pediatric Association Health Care Delivery Award for outstanding leadership in the area of child health.



## LANGUAGE SERVICES AT BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER:

### Carrying on a Tradition of Excellence

BMC's language services program comes from a strong legacy of language service leadership. The Boston area experienced an influx of Southeast Asian and Haitian refugees in the early 1980's. During that time, Raquel Cashman joined BMC, became its first Director of Interpreter Services, and co-founded the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) in 1986. In honor of her contributions to the industry, the IMIA recognizes outstanding language service professionals with the **Raquel Cashman Award**.

Today, Acuna-Martinez and BMC carry on the work Cashman started 30 years ago.

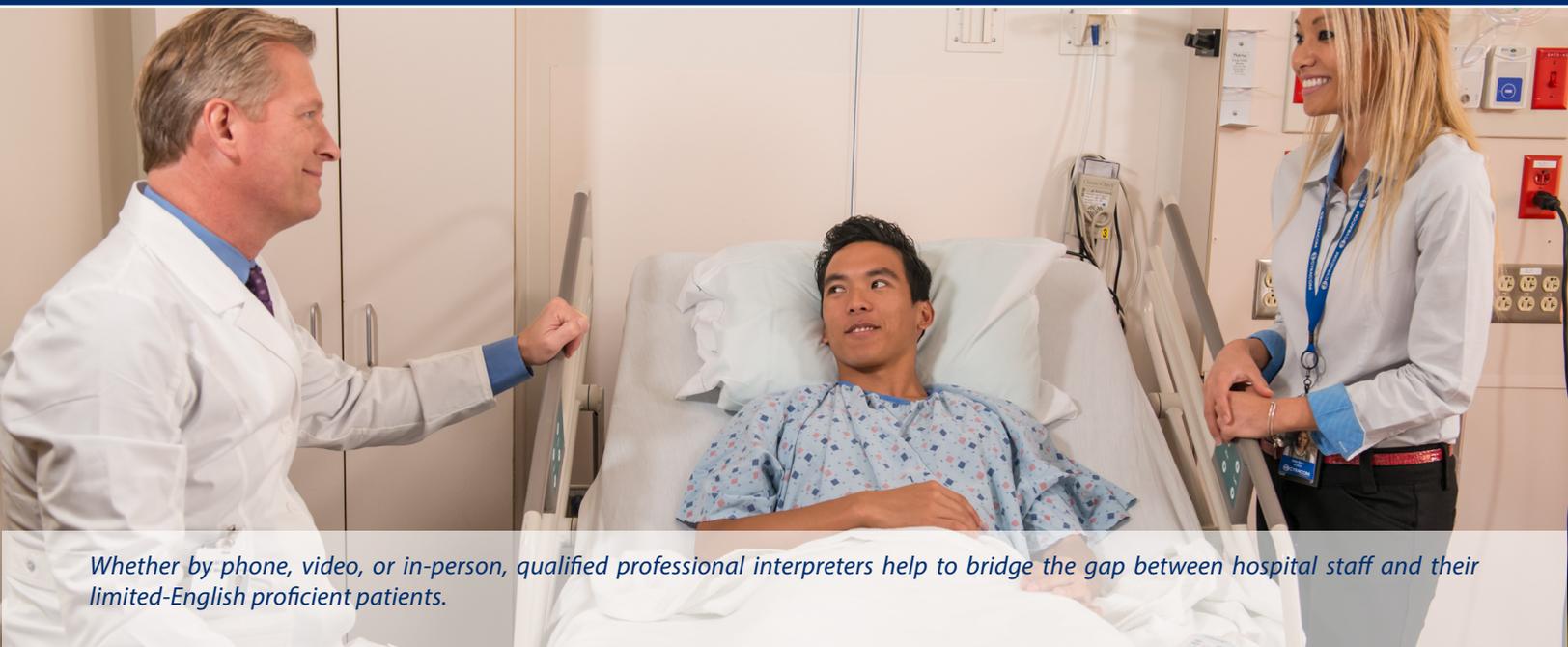
"We cover 15 languages using a pool of 65 hospital staff interpreters," Acuna-Martinez explained. "We provide interpretation for close to 300,000 patients per year, with probably twice that many interactions."

BMC's on-site language services program provides 24/7 coverage for Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian, and Cape Verdean. Hospital staff can book an interpreter on-demand.



BMC's executive team understands the importance of language services and makes it a priority. When addressing Boston's diversity at speaking events, executives regularly highlight Acuna-Martinez's successful program.

"Starting from the CEO and all the way down, everyone knows interpreter services because everyone needs us at one point or another," she noted. "Depending on the clinic, the vast majority of the patients we treat may be LEP!"



*Whether by phone, video, or in-person, qualified professional interpreters help to bridge the gap between hospital staff and their limited-English proficient patients.*

## Interpreters with a Passion for the Work



**Elida Acuna-Martinez**

Acuna-Martinez herself came to the US from Mexico at age 12. She was accepted into MIT’s engineering program but was unable to qualify for financial aid due to the status of her visa. With her dream of higher education temporarily on hold, she went to work.

“I started working for a woman who ran an interpreting agency and joined her on appointments,” she recalls. “She gave me training materials. I worked hard, studied, and fell in love with medical interpreting. She used to test me, having me act as an interpreter with her by my side until she determined I was ready to interpret on my own.”

After acting as an interpreter at Mass General for 11 years, Acuna-Martinez joined BMC, serving as coordinator, supervisor, and now Director of Interpreter Services over the last 7 years. Though she no longer interprets on a day-to-day basis, her passion for the work remains strong.

“You know you made a difference in somebody’s life because you helped them, and it’s so rewarding,” she added. “That’s why I feel like it’s not a job - I do something I love and get paid for it.”

Acuna-Martinez’s staff shares her passion and experience. “I have a Spanish interpreter who has worked for BMC for 45 years,” she explained. “We have a Somali Interpreter who was one of the first to settle in Boston - a leader in the community. Same thing goes for our Ethiopian interpreter – he runs a community-based organization and attracts a lot of patients for that reason.”

## Providing Equitable Care with a CyraCom Partnership

Boston Medical aims to provide their LEP population with the same care as English-speaking patients, and that means partnering with an outside language services provider. On-site interpreters handle about 25% of non-English-speaking patient encounters, while the remaining 75% use phone and video interpretation provided by CyraCom.

***“We care about every single patient,” Acuna-Martinez said. “That’s why we partner with CyraCom - we have the same goals.”***

Acuna-Martinez attended CyraCom’s annual Healthcare Language Services Summit in October 2015, meeting industry speakers, language services leaders, and current CyraCom clients from across the country. A month later, BMC became a CyraCom client.



***“We started in November of 2015,” Acuna-Martinez noted. “Switching was the best thing we could have done, and I can tell you why:”***

## 1 *Efficient Implementation*

“CyraCom’s implementation team made the process easy,” Acuna-Martinez recalled. “We needed 1,200 phones installed and staff training on how to use the service. CyraCom got it done in three days – three very long days, but they got it done. I couldn’t believe how quickly they worked.”

Today, BMC has increased that number to nearly 1,900 CyraCom phones.



CYRACOM DUAL-HANDSET BLUE PHONE



ACCESS CYRACOM INTERPRETERS VIA DESKTOP, TABLET, OR SMARTPHONE VIA THE INTERPRETER APP.

## 2 *Real-Time Responsiveness*

“CyraCom doesn’t feel like a vendor,” Acuna-Martinez explained. “Their staff act as partners, answering any questions I have and giving advice based on their experience working with hospitals nationwide.”

“My account manager checks in all the time just to make sure things are running well,” she continued. “We had a question about connectivity the other day – I sent an email and got an answer within seconds. The issue was on our end, but CyraCom helped us solve it.”

“Connecting to an interpreter for our most frequently-used languages is faster than what we had before, and CyraCom’s reporting is much more efficient. With our previous vendor, I had to wait a month to get reporting and address specific patient complaints - too late to hold anyone accountable. With CyraCom, I can log into the account management portal and see what happened 15 minutes ago.”

## 3 *The Right Tools for the Job*

“We make resources available for our staff to do the right thing, like having multiple modalities available for every patient encounter,” Acuna-Martinez said. “Inpatient beds can accommodate CyraCom dual-handset phones, and the exam rooms are set up for phone interpretation,” she explained.

“We have 90 CyraCom iPad video interpretation carts in clinics and most inpatient exam rooms. We distribute them to the management of each department - some departments have several, and those who don’t are asking for more.”



CYRACOM’S FLEX ELITE VIDEO INTERPRETATION CART (LEARN MORE HERE)

## 4 *Cost Savings through Increased Efficiency*



Using CyraCom has impacted BMC’s bottom line, increasing efficiency and reducing language services costs. Given BMC’s diverse patient population and high level of utilization, Acuna-Martinez values this efficiency.

“Often, our staff will bring the patient to an exam room, call a CyraCom interpreter, tell the patient the doctor is on their way, and then leave the room,” she noted. “If the doctor is delayed, CyraCom, as a matter of policy, disconnects the call after five minutes. We save a lot of money when billing doesn’t continue indefinitely.”

## 5 *Better Reporting for Joint Commission Compliance*

BMC found CyraCom’s real-time reporting functionality to be an asset during their last Joint Commission survey.

“Most of the patient files they surveyed were limited-English proficient,” Acuna-Martinez recalled. “The Joint Commission wanted to see what modality we used for each patient – phone, video, or face-to-face – and our records weren’t always complete. I was already working with CyraCom at that time, so I was able to pull the reporting and cross reference it to see what kind of interpreters we provided.”



*CyraCom’s Interpreter app allows providers and patients quick, convenient access to video interpretation.*

The survey motivated Acuna-Martinez to update BMC’s interpreter documentation process and to see how CyraCom could help.

“The Joint Commission surveyors mentioned that we need LEP patient records to include details on each interpreter interaction: who requested the interpreter, which interpretation modality we used, and what was discussed. All of that should be documented in the file,” she said. “So our forms now include specific fields to document that information.”

“We’re also working with CyraCom to add an automated reminder message our staff would hear whenever they call an interpreter – something to remind them to document their usage,” she continued. “Despite their training, staff sometimes forget. So we’re adding the reminder when they dial in to use an interpreter.”

## About CyraCom

In business for 25 years, CyraCom is a language services leader that provides interpretation and translation services to thousands of organizations across the US and worldwide.

Providing the best language services is a complex formula, and CyraCom considers every piece of the equation: quality, availability, security, speed and accessibility, and client support.

Visit [www.cyracom.com](http://www.cyracom.com) to learn more about our suite of language services.

## Contact CyraCom

Contact CyraCom today to discuss how we can improve your language services program.

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