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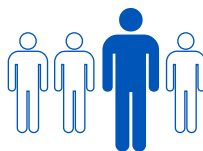


# LEE HEALTH: ENSURING EQUITABLE CARE FOR A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Lee Health is a southwest Florida health system consisting of four acute care hospitals and two specialty hospitals. The organization – founded in 1916 when a group of community leaders raised \$300 to launch Ft. Myers' first hospital – recently celebrated 100 years of pursuing its mission: To be a trusted partner, empowering healthier lives through care and compassion.

Lee County is home to 650,000 residents. Nearly one in four speaks a language other than English at home, and the county-wide illiteracy rate is 13%. Lee Health's most-commonly-requested language is Spanish, but patients arrive speaking Haitian Creole, German, ASL, and less-common languages as well.

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Yemisi Oloruntola-Coates is Lee's System Director of Diversity and Patient Care Civil Rights. She joined Lee's Diversity department in 2007 and has spent the past decade building a leading language services program dedicated to caring for the Ft. Myers community. Ms. Yemisi was eager to share her insights on a number of topics relevant to language services leaders today.

## PROVIDING CARE IN UNCOMMON LANGUAGES

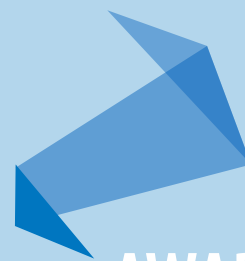
Lee Health employs 15 full-time staff interpreters providing face-to-face interpretation in Spanish, Haitian-Creole, German, French, and American Sign Language. But given the diversity of Lee County, they often encounter less-common languages.

"We see many patients from Guatemala, where they speak more than 20 indigenous dialects," Ms. Yemisi explained. "Some are rare, and we can't assume a patient speaks Spanish simply because they're from a Latin-American country."

She recalled one case that required Lee to go above and beyond in identifying a language:

"We had a patient years ago - a toddler from Guatemala whose mother needed to consent to his surgery. Her Spanish comprehension was quite low, but we learned that she spoke Mam - a dialect spoken by a very small population. CyraCom helped us locate one of only a handful of Mam interpreters in the US - it was amazing. We were able to connect with the mother, and her baby was able to have surgery that day."

"We had another situation where CyraCom was instrumental: a patient from China needed surgery but spoke a dialect our director couldn't identify. Our staff called CyraCom and asked for a Chinese interpreter, but it became clear that the patient didn't understand. I explained to our team that CyraCom could help identify the language, and they did! Together, we reached the patient's granddaughter who was able to give us the specific dialect - which CyraCom supported. So we were able to schedule and obtain consent for surgery."



## AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Lee Health is consistently recognized for their quality care and community engagement. Recent awards include:

Top Hospitals in the U.S. by The Leapfrog Group (*Cape Coral and Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida*)

Healthgrades Labor and Delivery Excellence Award (*Gulf Coast Medical Center*)

American Hospital Association Health Forums Most Wired Award (*Cape Coral Hospital, Gulf Coast Medical Center, Lee Memorial Hospital, HealthPark Medical Center*) – three years running

Surescripts White Coat of Quality Award – three years running

American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke

Gold Plus Quality Achievement Award (*Cape Coral, Gulf Coast, Lee Memorial*)

Florida Hospital Association (FHA) Celebration of Service Award for Leadership in Quality and Patient Safety (*Cape Coral*)

America's Essential Hospitals Gage Award for Population Health (*Healthy Lee program*)

Governor's Sterling Award (*Cape Coral*)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Top 50 Diversity and Language Services Departments

# Spotlight:

Yemisi

Oloruntola-Coates

"I grew up wanting to be an ambassador or a diplomat," Ms. Yemisi explained. "I taught English in rural Shiga, Japan. My school was on top of a mountain and I rode my bike and got oil to heat my house and monkeys used to invade our school, and I loved it. There was some anxiety on all sides about sending me there – I'm Nigerian, and the locals had never seen or interacted with anyone who looked like me."

"My supervisor told me I was a cultural ambassador as well as an English teacher," she continued. "I learned so much, and the students there gained experience as well. I had one student tell me 'I looked up the word "black" in the dictionary and it said "dark; gloomy; evil". But that's not you - you're a ray of sunshine.' That's where I learned the true meaning of diversity and inclusion. I no longer felt like an outsider; I felt like part of a community."

Ms. Yemisi went on to attend graduate school at the University of Florida, studying political science and global strategic communication management. She realized, well after putting down local roots, that "Florida was not the place to become a diplomat or an ambassador." She began looking for a new challenge.

"A friend told me about a language services supervisor position at Lee. She thought I'd be a great fit with my background teaching ESL and speaking other languages. My supervisor from Japan wrote my letter of recommendation, which was the talk of the town at Lee - they did not see that every day in Florida. I've found the position to be very rewarding; I'm not living abroad, but in a way I am an ambassador to our community for Lee Health."

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CARE THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

"One of the things I most appreciate is that Lee has an excellent PR department. They've gotten me on local TV shows and newscasts to promote the work we're doing and the services we offer," Ms. Yemisi explained. "I've been interviewed for newspaper articles as well. We prioritize multiple touchpoints with the community and external communication." These communication efforts include confronting the realities of caring for a disadvantaged community.

"We're doing a readability study on our consent forms," Ms. Yemisi noted. "They're written at a 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>-grade reading level, whereas the average US resident reads at 8<sup>th</sup> grade comprehension or below."

"Cyracom is helping us move readability down to a 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>-grade reading level in English before translating it. In Lee County, illiteracy is an issue, so we need to make the paperwork as straightforward as possible."



Health literacy and access are also concerns in Lee County, and Lee Health is confronting them directly.

"It's a diverse area. The ACA has helped, but we still have pockets of high unemployment and depressed socioeconomic status. We've set up Lee Community Healthcare centers in areas of high healthcare utilization and significant LEP populations. Patients can walk or bike to them, and we've equipped them with staff interpreters and CyraCom video carts. We charge for service on a sliding scale based on the patients' ability to pay."



CyraCom can provide materials to help identify the language that patients speak, and assist in meeting compliance goals.

# CRAFTING A TIERED APPROACH TO LANGUAGE SERVICES

Lee Health uses multiple modalities to provide access for non-English patients, incorporating:

1

## STAFF INTERPRETERS:

15 employees provide face-to-face interpretation in Spanish, Haitian-Creole, German, French, and American Sign Language.



2

## CYRACOM BLUE PHONES AND VIDEO CARTS:

Partnering with CyraCom enables Lee to provide interpretation in hundreds of languages – an important capability because Florida draws tourism from a variety of non-English-speaking countries. “We get all kinds of people and languages from all over the world in this little town, and CyraCom is able to support that,” Ms. Yemisi said.

3

## DUAL-ROLE INTERPRETERS:

In 2008, Lee received a grant to develop a training program for bilingual staff who wished to act as interpreters.

“I worked with one of my interpreters, Norma Schuler, to create the curriculum,” Ms. Yemisi remembered. “We offer the class four times a year. There’s an oral and written language proficiency pretest to get in. Then, at the end, we test our candidates once more to determine their level of interpreter proficiency.”

In addition to protecting patients from errors caused by inaccurate interpretation, this process also helps Lee comply with Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. The law mandates that bilingual staff must demonstrate language proficiency and be assigned interpretation as an official job duty prior to communicating with patients in-language.

## Phone Interpretation

“Our reliance on the blue phones has increased tremendously over the years. We have great on-site staff interpreters, but we understand they can’t be in multiple places at once. Our needs vary quite a bit by location as well. 30% of our Healthpark Medical patients need interpreters, so our staff handles 15-20% of requests and CyraCom covers the rest.”

## Video Interpretation

“We’ve placed a video cart in each of our emergency rooms and at each admin/supervisor office. The administrators manage LEP patient flow and distribute carts as needed. Each physician’s office has its own video cart as well. And we’ve equipped our new children’s hospital with a cart on each floor. We even have a diversity intranet where departments can request additional blue phones, video carts, and other resources.”





# IMPLEMENTING A QUALITY LANGUAGE SERVICES PARTNER

## Switching to CyraCom

In 2008, Lee Health held a vendor fair to choose a new language services provider. “We invited CyraCom and one of their competitors to let our staff sample the service,” Ms. Yemisi recalled. “We let them try both options, and overwhelmingly they loved CyraCom.” Ms. Yemisi noted that since the switch, Lee has valued CyraCom’s focus on healthcare, dedicated account management, and the efforts of CyraCom’s implementation unit.

“When we signed up, we had just acquired two hospitals and were building a third,” she said. “We’re a large system and I didn’t have the resources to do such a big roll-out. I had just taken the job, and it was a lot to handle.”

“CyraCom was an integral part of the process and has been throughout the years. I remember the Implementation Director walking the halls helping us get started,” Ms. Yemisi continued. “It’s been wonderful to partner with CyraCom on two major rollouts – they’re very loyal to their hospital partners, with real customer focus and a hands-on approach. That’s what I was looking for, and I didn’t see it anywhere else.”

## Implementing Video Interpretation on a Large Scale

When Lee Health received a government grant to purchase video carts and implement CyraCom’s video interpretation service, they wanted to ensure staff could use the new resource effectively.

“I notified our campuses that this resource was coming and scheduled multiple 30-minute-training times at each campus so staff could come in when convenient,” Ms. Yemisi explained. “We tracked attendance at each training and handed out collateral on video interpretation.” CyraCom’s implementation team led the training sessions, explaining the benefits and mechanics of using video interpretation.

“After the roll-out, we followed up by attending every meeting we could get into – leadership, quality gatherings, and nursing orientation – and did in-service training unit-by-unit to ensure everyone got the message,” Ms. Yemisi recalled. “We trained over 600 leaders, directors, supervisors, trainers, and RNs during that first phase.”

Once Lee Health’s hospital staff was trained, CyraCom moved on to Lee Physician Group doctors’ offices spread throughout Southwest Florida. Ms. Yemisi divided these offices by region and sent CyraCom trainers through three different counties. In total, CyraCom trained 1,300 Lee staff members in 30 days.

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*You can access CyraCom interpreters with any phone capable of calling a 1-800 number or with the devices above.*

## SECURING STAFF ADOPTION AND ACHIEVING COMPLIANCE

Ms. Yemisi offered several best practices for ensuring staff have the knowledge and buy-in needed to use language services consistently.

### 1 Utilize New Hire Training

Every new Lee Health employee receives language access training during system orientation. “Everybody learns about the resources - blue phones and video carts. Then nursing orientation and department heads get a more detailed language access training,” Ms. Yemisi said.

Training goes beyond the mechanics of language services, including cultural competency to help staff understand patients from different backgrounds. This understanding may reduce avoidable errors and improve patient outcomes, and Ms. Yemisi believes that Lee staff benefits from it as well.

“I tell my trainees ‘It’s okay to be uncomfortable with the unknown, as long as you don’t stay there,’” she recalled. “We do a training called Stepping Outside of your Cultural Comfort. When you’re willing to do that, you can learn something that can completely change your life.”

### 2 Administer Frequent Testing and Retraining

Lee recently created a “Diversity Tracer” – a system-wide process for tracking language services usage. “We survey nurses, techs, and physicians to ensure they have a baseline understanding of the resources: ‘How do you document that a patient needs an interpreter? What does the policy state? What are the resources available to you?’” noted Ms. Yemisi. “This gives us real-time readings on our staff’s knowledge level, and we can break down the scores by hospital or interpretation modality.”

“It’s extremely data-driven,” she continued. “If we notice that one department scores a 60% on knowledgeability, we can schedule retraining, set up periodic rounding to ensure compliance, and analyze the patient population they’re seeing. It helps guide our work so we can be proactive rather than reactive. My whole approach is decreasing knowledge deficits and ensuring staff understands the resources available.”



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

### 3 Overcome Objections to Phone and Video

Staff buy-in is crucial for a successful language services program, and for Lee, that meant overcoming objections to new technology.

"Some providers do prefer on-site interpreters," Ms. Yemisi conceded. "But we've been able to explain the benefits that phone interpretation offers. We have people walking in speaking languages that neither on-site nor video can cover, whereas the blue phone has hundreds of languages available."

"Education in how to use the phones is critical," she added, "and that's what's changed over the years. We do massive in-servicing now. CyraCom's Implementation team and our dedicated Account Manager collaborated with me, getting in front of leadership, reaching staff at multiple touchpoints, and ensuring the information is passed along and absorbed."

"We've seen utilization increase as a result. We're now in a place where departments are asking us to come and provide training, where before I'm banging on their door to get in and educate. Now they're requesting the training, and that makes a big difference."

### 4 Use "Nudges" to Increase Adoption

"Nudge theory" is a behavioral science concept which advocates positive reinforcement and indirect suggestion as a means of achieving non-forced compliance. In her time as Director, Ms. Yemisi has successfully implemented several of these nudges. "One change we made was budgeting for interpreter services system-wide," she explained. "We used to bill each department when they used the services, which created a perverse incentive not to utilize interpreters. Since the switch, utilization is up and department heads don't feel pressure to manage usage."

"Another recent change involved adding a banner to the EPIC screen of every non-English-speaking patient. Anyone who pulls up the patient's record gets a message - "Interpreter Needed" - and it stays there until the provider documents using one. "It's an alert system," Ms. Yemisi said, "a hard stop reminding them 'Wait a minute, their primary language is Spanish. We need to provide an interpreter.'"

## About CyraCom

CyraCom is the leading provider of language interpreting services to healthcare. CyraCom services thousands of healthcare clients throughout the US, including many Fortune 500 healthcare providers – hospitals, systems, and insurers. We support hundreds of languages and operate 24/7.

CyraCom's employee interpreters work in the most extensive network of large-scale interpreter contact centers: all HIPAA-compliant and located in the continental US. Our interpreters receive 120 hours of initial, in-person training in the centers –three times longer than is typical in the language service industry. In training, interpreters learn medical terminology, anatomy and physiology, and other topics essential for healthcare interpreting. Upon completion of training and testing, they become certified interpreters.

### Contact CyraCom

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

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