

Evaluation of an Interpreter Block Booking System

Impact on interpreters working at The Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne

Summary

In 2008, The Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne (RDHM) conducted an evaluation on its interpreter booking system and noted:

- under-utilisation of purchased interpreter services
- pre-ordering of multiple interpreters to provide the same service for the same time period.

In 2009, RDHM introduced the following system to improve coordination of interpreters:

- a booking officer coordinates patient appointments and interpreter bookings
- weekly appointment blocks are allocated for speakers of the most frequently used languages: Chinese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese
- patients requiring interpreters for other languages are scheduled for the next available appointment with subsequent patients for that language scheduled immediately after, creating a block of two or more patients allocated to one interpreter.



Purpose of the evaluation

This poster reports only the perceived advantages and disadvantages for interpreters working in the new system. The complete evaluation will also consider impacts on RDHM staff and interpreters no longer working at RDHM, as well as the impact on interpreter usage and expenditure changes.

Method

Nine months after the implementation of the system, 10 interpreters from different languages were surveyed using a semi-structured interview technique to compare the new system with the old one. Only interpreters with experience in both systems were included in the evaluation.

Results

Advantages and disadvantages of the new system as seen by interpreters

1) Advantages of the new system include:

- interpreters feel valued because there is someone responsible for ensuring their work is well organised resulting in efficient use of their time
- patients appear to sense the interpreters' confidence in the system

2) Disadvantages of the new system include:

- some interpreters of the most frequently used languages are allocated more work without increased remuneration
- appointments running over time have an impact on subsequent appointments
- interpreters are not linked to patients until they arrive at the Hospital; this can be problematic in the case of conflicts of interest
- interpreters do not like waiting until the contracted time finishes if they are not actively working. This is considered disrespectful by some.

Conclusion

All interpreters considered that the level of service and professionalism remained the same under the new system.

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