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Director

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

February 4, 2008

AFL 08-04

TO: General Acute Care Hospitals

SUBJECT: Language Assistance Services

The purpose of this letter is to remind general acute care hospitals of the provisions contained in Health & Safety Code, Section 1259(c)(2) which require hospitals to submit on an annual basis, a copy of their policy on providing language assistance services to patients with language or communication barriers.

Specifically, Section 1259(c)(2) states:

“(c)To ensure access to health care information and services for limited-English-speaking or non-English-speaking residents and deaf residents, licensed general acute care hospitals shall:

(2) Adopt and review annually a policy for providing language assistance services to patients with language or communication barriers. The policy shall include procedures for providing, to the extent possible, as determined by the hospital, the use of an interpreter whenever a language or communication barrier exists, except where the patient, after being informed of the availability of the interpreter service, chooses to use a family member or friend who volunteers to interpret. The procedures shall be designed to maximize efficient use of interpreters and minimize delays in providing interpreters to patients. The procedures shall ensure, to the extent possible, as determined by the hospital, that interpreters are available, either on the premises or accessible by telephone, 24 hours a day. The hospital shall annually transmit to the state department a copy of the updated policy and shall include a description of its efforts to ensure adequate and speedy communication between patients with language or communication barriers and staff.”

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Hospitals should submit their policy to the respective Licensing and Certification district office. The California Department of Public Health appreciates your continued cooperation with this process.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by Kathleen Billingsley, R.N.

Kathleen Billingsley, R.N.
Deputy Director
Center for Healthcare Quality