Best Practice Guidelines for Machine Translation Tools and Devices

**Using Apps, Computer Programs and Other Resources to Communicate with Patients with Low English Proficiency**

There are many apps and programs that are intended to support communication with patients with low English proficiency. Effective communication with patients is extremely important, however, **these electronic and digital tools are not recommended for use within the healthcare setting**. While some of these tools may seem helpful to communicate very simple messages, they can be risky.

All available machine translation or interpreting devices that are currently available pose a risk for misinterpretation. While misinterpretation can also occur with human to human interpreting, machine interpreting does not include the same opportunities for clarification that human to human interpreting provides.

**Some concerns with the use of these electronic tools include:**

- It can be difficult to know whether the tool is using accurate and clear language. Tools typically do simple word-for-word translation, and are not able to analyze the text or phrase for appropriate grammatical structure, cultural references, and nuances embedded in the message that you are trying to communicate. Devices also have difficulty with framing concepts and have no ability to take context into account.

- Tools are not typically patient-centered. They often are intended to help the health care providers gather some of the information that they need, but generally are not able to help the patient communicate his/her thoughts or feelings.

- Many tools only allow the user to ask “yes or no” questions, so they do not allow the patient to expand on important points and add critical pieces of contextual information.

- Patients, especially those who are elderly or have challenges with literacy, may not be comfortable with the use of technological devices and may experience increased distress.

- Tools are not sophisticated enough to ensure that information is relayed in a way that is culturally appropriate and sensitive.

Professional language interpreters or translators should be used whenever possible when communicating about health issues with patients with low English proficiency.

Click [here](#) for guidelines about specific situations in which interpreters should be used.
Here are some questions that will also help you think about how a specific tool might be helpful or harmful in your work:

- Are there positive reviews in the literature from users of this tool? Are any negative impacts of using the tool described?
- Do you have sufficient information about how/when the tool should be used in order for it to be safe and effective?
- Was the tool developed in consultation with, or at least tested by, those who would use it in a healthcare setting?
- Was the tool reviewed by language and communication experts?
- Does the tool protect patient confidentiality as per the PHSA PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY policy?
- Do the images and functions included in the tool seem culturally appropriate for the patient?
- Does the tool address any issues for which consent are needed? When discussing issues that need consent with patients with low English proficiency, professional interpreters should always be used.
- Are you confident that the tool uses the appropriate dialect, tone and language for your patient?
- Does the tool seem to be sufficiently patient-centered, rather than solely allowing for the care provider to receive some of the information they want?
- Does the tool transfer any information directly into a patient’s chart? This should never occur—all information that is input into a chart should be reviewed by a human for accuracy.