

# Rell's Proposal Doesn't Make Sense

By Jeannette De Jesús

**M**edical interpretation is a professional service by which the health and related information that needs to be transmitted between a health care provider and patient is translated from English to the language that the patients best understands, and vice versa.

Besides the fact that this service makes good sense from legal, ethical and public health perspectives, and is mandated by federal and state law, medical interpretation makes good business sense.



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Last year, the Connecticut legislature acknowledged the value and importance of this service, and included public funding to cover its cost as part of the state Medicaid program's budget.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell's budget for Fiscal Year 2009 eliminates this allocation, and the mandate that it be a covered service.

It is of critical importance that both the funding and the mandate be restored.

## Necessary For Treatment

Effective communication between provider and patient is essential for accurate diagnosis and treatment, and for appropriate patient compliance with the health care instructions of health care providers.

Failure to achieve such communication could result in preventable medical complications, and even the tragic outcome of patient death.

Possibly associated are those related to: increased numbers of acute, subspecialty and emergency medical visits, and lawsuits, which are already a significant burden to the health care system.

In addition, the appropriation of state dollars for these services through the state's Med-

icaid budget would bring back to the state 50 percent of the allocated funds in federal match, which would provide an "added value" of service capacity to the state's health care system.

## Form Of Discrimination

Essentially, the relatively small dollar amount needed to pay for medical interpretation services should be conceptualized as a preventive measure that saves money in the long run, and brings added value to the state.

There are reasons other than the financial ones to support medical interpretation, starting with legal ones.

Under civil rights law, the denial or delay of medical care for limited English proficiency patients due to language barriers constitutes a form of discrimination.

From an ethical perspective, quality health care is something that all people deserve, regardless of wealth, race, culture, class, educational status or language.

Understanding and receiving accurate health information is not a luxury — it is a necessity, a civil and human rights issue.

One of the essential services of public health is assurance of the health of the public.

When something is identified as a barrier to adequate health care for a significant sector of the population, the public health system is charged with assessing the problem and developing solutions.

In this context, assurance of adequate communication in the health care setting is part of the public health charge.

The Latino Policy Institute, led by the Hispanic Health Council, urges the Connecticut legislature to reinstate the \$4.7 million previously allocated for Medicaid reimbursement of medical interpretation.

The health of the state's population and its budget will ultimately benefit.

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