Evaluation Report:
Remote Simultaneous Medical Interpretation
Executive Summary

Background
In 2011, as a result of the growing refugee population, an innovative project launched to improve the quality of language interpretation services in healthcare facilities.

Providing interpreter services can be costly and challenging to administrators, particularly for smaller institutions and for less commonly spoken language groups. A Remote Simultaneous Medical Interpretation service (RSMI) was designed to decrease the cost of medical interpretation while increasing the quality of services.

Program Summary
Three main objectives of the program:
- Create a call center to provide accurate language interpretation for common refugee languages in the area.
- Provide RSMI to multiple pilot sites that care for refugees, including pharmacies and health centers.
- Offer on-demand RSMI to physicians and other health professionals in the community.

Key Results

- RSMI phone lines were found reliable and easy to access.
- Providers and patients were satisfied with the accuracy of the RSMI interpreters.
- Patients preferred in-person interpreters as they felt there was greater comprehension and clarity.
- Providers and interpreters agreed that in-person interpretation was most suitable for initial refugee health visits.
- RSMI expanded interpreting options for select refugee languages.
- RSMI offered improved interpreting quality over alternatives.

Challenges and Learnings
- RSMI was found more expensive than interpreting alternatives, although growth could lead to economies of scale.
- Development and implementation of RSMI presented challenges as the chosen technology had not been tested outside of the setting in which it was created. A new technology provider was successfully obtained, but not without start-up delays and re-allocation of staff time to develop alternatives. This is an important lesson regarding funding and implementation of technology based interventions.
- Even with training, not all interpreters are considered suitable for RSMI, as particular aptitude is needed to interpret in two languages so rapidly.

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