



December 19, 2006

Dear State Hospital Association President:

Good medical care depends upon effective communication between patients and providers. Ineffective communication can lead to improper diagnosis and delayed or improper medical treatment. Effective communication with persons who have limited English proficiency, as well as persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, often requires interpreters or other services. Many hospitals are actively taking steps to address these needs. However, hospitals face increasing challenges to meet the communication needs of an increasingly diverse population.

In light of the vital importance of this issue, I am delighted to inform you of a new national initiative that the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the American Hospital Association, is launching to provide technical assistance and share resources to help hospitals communicate effectively with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have limited English proficiency. This initiative is founded on a critical goal that our organizations share – ensuring that all individuals have equal and meaningful access to quality health care.

As part of this national initiative, over the coming year, OCR, through its regional offices, will be working with a number of state hospital associations and their members to assess the communication needs of patients and their family members and to develop and implement a program of training and information-sharing about strategies, tools, best practices, educational materials and other resources to assist hospitals in responding appropriately and efficiently to these communication needs. As we work together in partnership at both the national and local levels, we look forward to further developing and refining these resources and making these resources, as well as the knowledge and experience gained through our state collaborations, available to a wider audience of hospital associations and hospitals.

I am pleased to tell you today about a new webpage that OCR has established specifically for hospitals seeking resources on effective communication, [www.hhs.gov/ocr/hospitalcommunication.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hospitalcommunication.html). Among the resources you will find are fact sheets on effective communication, guidance about the civil rights laws that apply, resources that discuss some of the issues related to payment for services, and information about successful resolutions of cases in this area. We plan to regularly update and improve this website, and hope that you will visit the website and find the information helpful.

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**We are enthusiastic about working with the American Hospital Association, which has already undertaken significant work in this area. We hope that you will join us, as well, in working on this new initiative. We share your commitment to providing quality health care for all and are confident that our joint efforts to facilitate effective communication in hospital settings will bring us closer to realizing this goal.**

**Thank you in advance for your support.**

**Sincerely,**

**/Winston A. Wilkinson/  
Winston A. Wilkinson, J.D.  
Director  
Office for Civil Rights**