

'Too few' know of telephone interpreters

Members of ethnic minorities have been able to use over-the-phone interpreters when seeking health care at public health clinics and hospitals since June, but a concern group says the service is not well publicised.

Telephone interpreters are available to help patients who speak Hindi, Nepali, Urdu and Punjabi.

Medical staff can call the HKSCH Lady MacLehose Centre, which will either organise phone interpreters or send interpreters to do the job face-to-face. The centre handled 145 cases from June to September last year, the Hospital Authority said. Most of them involved interpreting for people who spoke Urdu.

Interpreting over the telephone, which was available around the clock, improved the quality of health services, said Victor Choi Sze-kwong, a senior medical officer with the Hospital Authority. In the past, hospitals and clinics that needed interpreters had to request the services of court interpreters, Dr Choi said, but there were often delays of several days. With telephone interpreting services, the wait can be shortened to 30 minutes.

To help people diagnose illnesses, the Hospital Authority has produced 12 booklets written in various languages that list the symptoms of common illnesses.

"The books are for urgent cases," Dr Choi said. "We can do preliminary diagnoses and prescribe drugs without waiting for an interpreter."

However, a spokesman for the Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club General Outpatient Clinic, where about 8 to 10 per cent of the patients are from ethnic minorities, said no one had yet asked for a telephone interpreter.

Fermi Wong Wai-fun, campaign director with the ethnic minority concern group [Unison Hong Kong](#), said: "Few doctors or patients know about telephone interpreting {hellip} I don't know anyone who has used it."

But some interpreters working for hospitals and clinics were not professional enough, said Ms Wong.

They abbreviated what patients said, interpreted incorrectly or tried to sell their interpreting services for use outside hospital settings, she said. "If patients are not satisfied with the service, it is not clear who they should complain to," Ms Wong said. "Is it the Hospital Authority or SKH?"



'Too few' know of telephone interpreters

# 'Too few' know of telephone interpreters



Victor Choi asks a patient to indicate his nationality so a face-to-face interpreter can be arranged for him at the Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club General Outpatient Clinic. Photo: KY. Cheng

## Amy Nip

Members of ethnic minorities have been able to use over-the-phone interpreters when seeking health care at public health clinics and hospitals since June, but a concern group says the service is not well publicised.

Telephone interpreters are available to help patients who speak Hindi, Nepali, Urdu and Punjabi.

Medical staff can call the HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre, which will

either organise phone interpreters or send interpreters to do the job face-to-face. The centre handled 145 cases from June to September last year, the Hospital Authority said. Most of them involved interpreting for people who spoke Urdu.

Interpreting over the telephone, which was available around the clock, improved the quality of health services, said Victor Choi Sze-kwong, a senior medical officer with the Hospital Authority. In the past, hospitals

and clinics that needed interpreters had to request the services of court interpreters, Dr Choi said, but there were often delays of several days. With telephone interpreting services, the wait can be shortened to 30 minutes.

To help people diagnose illnesses, the Hospital Authority has produced 12 booklets written in various languages that list the symptoms of common illnesses.

"The books are for urgent cases,"

Dr Choi said. "We can do preliminary diagnoses and prescribe drugs without waiting for an interpreter."

However, a spokesman for the Yau Ma Tei Jockey Club General Outpatient Clinic, where about 8 to 10 per cent of the patients are from ethnic minorities, said no one had yet asked for a telephone interpreter.

Fermi Wong Wai-fun, campaign director with the ethnic minority concern group Unison Hong Kong, said: "Few doctors or patients know

about telephone interpreting ... I don't know anyone who has used it."

But some interpreters working for hospitals and clinics were not professional enough, said Ms Wong.

They abbreviated what patients said, interpreted incorrectly or tried to sell their interpreting services for use outside hospital settings, she said. "If patients are not satisfied with the service, it is not clear who they should complain to," Ms Wong said. "Is it the Hospital Authority or SKH?"