

THE SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL HOSPITAL FOUNDATION NEWS

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Interpreter Services: Saving Lives One Language at a Time

In an organization dedicated to treating and healing people, clear communication is critical. The Interpreter Services Department at SFGH makes that communication possible for thousands of people, regardless of their ability to speak English.

“About 20 percent of all patients who come here don’t speak English. If they can’t understand what their illness is, or how to treat it or what medications to take, they’re not going to get better,” says Gloria Garcia Orme, Director of Patient Relations.

On-site interpreters are available to interpret in 10 different languages, and SFGH has on-call access to interpreters of another 35 languages. In January, through a generous grant from The California Endowment, the hospital also began to provide medical interpretation through videoconference calls.

Videoconferencing Medical Interpretation (VMI) saves both time and money, primarily by reducing prolonged

waiting times for patients, doctors, medical staff, and interpreters. And the near-instant service VMI provides can make all the difference in the clinical settings where seconds count.

Just as important is the quality of service VMI helps render. Reading a patient’s body language is an important part of interpreting, and the video camera provides the interpreter with that benefit. At the same time, patients can see the interpreter they may already know and trust on a video monitor.

Soon SFGH’s VMI services will be connected to Oakland’s Highland Hospital, thereby enabling both medical centers to share interpreter services.

“For example, if Highland Hospital doesn’t have an Arabic interpreter we could provide them with access to ours,” says Orme. “At the same time, we could use their Cambodian interpreter when the need arises.”

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SFGH Foundation Welcomes New Executive Director

The SFGH Foundation has ushered in the next era by bringing new executive director Katherine Ripley-Williams on to lead the way. Ripley-Williams brings nearly two decades of experience in fundraising for healthcare to her role.

Prior to joining the SFGH Foundation, Ripley-Williams served as vice president of development for the Northern California Institute for Research and Education, the fundraising arm of San Francisco’s VA Medical Center. She has also managed development efforts for the University of Colorado Hospital, the UCSF Foundation, and The Children’s Clinic of Los Angeles County.

“All these institutions have provided me with a good understanding of how medical research, education, and healthcare are undertaken in the United States,” says Ripley-Williams.



Katherine Ripley-Williams

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Patient describes symptoms to doctor using VMI interpreter.

Interpreter Services

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Regardless of whether the interpreters are on-site, available by telephone, or connected through VMI, Orme explains, they “help ensure efficient and accurate diagnoses.”

She adds that the department’s interpreters are fully trained, not just in interpreting languages, but in cultural brokering and medical terminology, as well. They also have to be sensitive to the patients.

“One time I ran into an interpreter who was in tears. She had just come from telling a family their child no longer had brain function,” says Orme. “The work can be intense at times. But we’re always saving lives.”✎

Executive Director

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“I wanted very much to come to the SFGH Foundation,” she adds. “In these trying economic times, the Foundation plays a critical role in providing the SFGH with much-needed revenue. That’s especially important, given how many people in our community are unable to afford health insurance.”

Even before Ripley-Williams began working in healthcare, she was involved with, and inspired by, a variety of nonprofit organizations.

“In the nonprofit sector, there is the opportunity not only to impact organizational outcomes, but to educate the public,” she says. “That’s what one must do to raise money and, when that happens, you’ve influenced policy. Healthcare is a major issue that’s before all of us, and we’ve got to make it a public priority.”

According to Judy Guggenhime, SFGH Foundation president, it’s that kind of dedication and insight that makes Ripley-Williams well-poised for “taking us to new levels. Because she’s so committed to public healthcare, we expect Katherine to be an effective voice for the Foundation and for the hospital,” Guggenhime adds. “We’re thrilled to have her.”✎

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Working Their Way Back Into the Community: The SFGH Prevocational Program

Flowers at work make most people happy, but they bring a little extra joy for Amelia Truman. Director of the Psychiatric Prevocational Program at San Francisco General Hospital, Truman oversees the transition of long-term psychiatric patients back into the community. Through the Prevocational Program, clients take on jobs operating the flower business, selling coffee, running a clothing cart, and providing other valuable services to the hospital.

“Learning skills and working in a business environment stabilizes the clients and gives them a whole new sense of self,” explains Truman. “These people are really struggling when they come to us. They’ve spent years in and out of every kind of treatment and failed.”

Truman and her staff work with case managers to create an individualized plan for each client in the program, based on his

or her unique history, illness, cognitive ability, and special needs. The program gives clients the skills and structure to reduce hospitalizations, build community, and think of themselves as someone other than a psychiatric patient.

“It can be a slow process, but we do help them reach the next step in their lives,” says Truman.

With the flower business, clients go to the San Francisco Flower Mart with an SFGH staff member. The clients pick the flowers, bring them back, put them in vases, and sell them to hospital staff.

The flowers aren’t the only things blossoming. One client told Truman that, before he got his job, “he didn’t know he could dream. He didn’t even think he had the right to. Now he’s doing a great job selling coffee,” she says. “The most important gift we can give our clients is a sense of belonging.” 🌻

“An Evening in Havana”

Benefiting the Bay Area Perinatal AIDS Center (BAPAC)

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

6-9 pm

Café Cocomo 650 Indiana St

call 206-8919 for tickets

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Of Note

New Officers Announced

The Board of Directors of the SFGH Foundation is pleased to announce its officers for 2005:

- **Judy Guggenhime**, President (third term)
- **Jonathan Tsao**, Vice-President
- **David Post**, Treasurer
- **Jessica Parish Galloway**, Secretary

CARE Program Honored

The Cancer Awareness Resources & Education (CARE) Program at SFGH was awarded the Grand Prize for Excellence in Patient Education by the California Pacific Medical Center.

SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL HOSPITAL FOUNDATION

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The San Francisco General Hospital Foundation is dedicated to improving the care and comfort of patients at the San Francisco General Hospital.