

Synapse

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Volunteer Health Interpreters Organization: Better Communication for Better Healthcare

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Contributing Writers

As an expanding UC Berkeley student-led group, Volunteer Health Interpreters Organization (VHIO) is dedicated to providing interpretation and translation services to the underserved community. Whenever the opportunity arises, we try our best to provide assistance to UCSF student projects that serve communities throughout the Bay Area.

On November 12, 2011, we were able to collaborate with Julie Dang, a coordinator for UCSF School of Pharmacy's Project Brown Bag's event in which student pharmacists individually counseled patients from different medical backgrounds on their medications while addressing any and all related concerns. The main goal at the clinic at the Mission Creek Senior Community Center was to provide individuals with valuable information and interaction with pharmacists and pharmacy students that they might otherwise not receive as a result of limitations in mobility and/or language barriers.

With some planning and supplementary training on our part, our VHIO members were able to help interpret in Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish for both the pharmacists and patients present. Overall, it was an incredibly beneficial and educational experience for our members, whom Julie lauded as well-trained, familiar with medical terminology, and professional.

With roots tracing back to 2007, VHIO (formerly known as SF Hepatitis B Collaborative) has helped with several UCSF-sponsored Hepatitis B clinics. In August 2010, we renamed ourselves VHIO in keeping with our desire to expand beyond Hepatitis B to other equally important health issues as well as to address the increased demand for interpretation services. Since then, we have been actively providing our services at events such as Partners in D, and for screenings in relation to skin cancer, Alzheimer's disease, etc.

Training is crucial to ensuring the high quality of VHIO's services when sending our members to clinics, community outreach events, screening events, and for document translations. VHIO trains its members through a student-run Healthcare Interpreting course required for all new members during their fall semester. The class meets for three hours each week, and the curriculum is adapted from the 60-hour Connecting Worlds Curriculum conducted by Language and Culture Access Program at Asian Health Services, which incorporates the California Standards for Healthcare Interpreters developed by the California Healthcare Interpreting Association (CHIA). In the spring, monthly workshops are held to review of patient confidentiality, basic interpreting guidelines, background of conditions and diseases in addition to providing a space for them to practice their spoken medical terminology and phrases.

To reflect our expanded scope of language capacities and the diverse service base across the San Francisco Bay Area, Spanish is now one of the five languages available for our interpretation and translation services. In short, our services are provided in Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, and now Spanish. We are also currently developing Tagalog and Khmer. We are committed to outreach and continually establishing new partnerships and volunteering opportunities and have plans to expand to other language departments in the future.

We hope that positive commendations such as those from Julie Deng and others of VHIO great work to the UCSF student community will give us a chance to help better serve the non-English-speaking community. For more information, please go to our website www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~vhio and don't hesitate to contact us at cal.vhio@gmail.com. We look forward to communicating and building new collaborations with other UCSF student groups that would like to utilize our interpretation or translation services!

Edna Cheung and Kathy Doan are UC Berkeley students.

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