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Intercultural sensitivity on the websites of the hospitals belonging to the Andalusian Public Health Service (SSPA), Spain

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Abstract

Attention to interculturality in hospital web services should be considered as an aspect to take into account as an indicator of quality, especially given that little evidence is available about it in the general literature. Accordingly we undertook a study among the Andalusian hospitals of the Andalusian Public Health Service (SSPA), which are committed to provide the citizens with a quality service (considered for our purposes to be the services related to web pages). We undertook a cross-sectional, observational study to assess intercultural contact between immigrants and the hospital via web pages. We used a test to determine the presence or absence of certain intercultural attributes grouped into 3 sections composed of different items: languages, corporate values and content, and information content for immigrants on the web pages of the SSPA hospitals.

The results indicate that the web pages of the SSPA hospitals are not designed for intercultural relations with immigrants, given the lack of translation of these attributes to different languages on the hospital web pages.

In conclusion, we found a complete lack of linguistic diversity, and little interest in this aspect by the managers of these hospitals or the Andalusian Ministry of Health. On the other hand however, the notice concerning the rights and obligations of the citizens has been translated into 7 different languages. Very little consideration was given to translations of food menus or information about religious services. The Andalusian Health Ministry has preferred to use a telephone translation service rather than having permanent translators available in the hospitals. More information for immigrants should be provided on the web pages, such as manuals and guides as well as cross-border health information.

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1. Introduction

On most occasions immigrants are forced to abandon their country due to the need to improve their lives, even at the expense of placing their own lives at risk in the search for a country that will admit them and enable them to lead a more dignified life. Despite ever more restrictive laws and closing of borders, immigrants are still arriving at countries considered to be “rich” or “developed”, due, among other reasons, to the economy of demand, as is the case of Spain (CGT, 2004). This has only widened the gap between Europe and Africa caused by the imbalance in wealth and life expectancy, though without doubt the main cause is poverty.

According to the Spanish Royal Academy (2016) immigration is considered to be the arrival of a person with a view to settling down either in a foreign country or in a different part of the same country, in search of improving their living conditions. Human migratory movements have led to the development over recent years of multicultural societies in developed countries, including in Spain.

Concerning immigration, Andalusia possesses particular characteristics that make it different to other autonomous regions in Spain, in particular its geographical location, which has resulted in Andalusia becoming a port of entry to Europe for immigrants from many countries. It is notable that 52% of registered foreigners in Andalusia belong to European Union countries. This is about 10% higher than for the rest of Spain (Permanent Migration Observatory of Andalusia (OPAM))

The typical profile of an immigrant to Andalusia, according to a report by the Centre for Andalusian Studies (2008), shows that 35% of foreigners are citizens of the EU (British, Italians and Germans, in that order). The rest are immigrants from other countries outside the EU, mainly Morocco (21.6%), Ecuador, Colombia, and the Argentine.

Given this situation action is required to encourage interculturality with a view to closing the gap between the different cultures. As Soriano mentioned (2007): Nowadays understanding other cultures, other views of the world, other ways to think, feel and act is no longer optional; rather it is vital and essential for an enriching and orderly social harmony.

2. Language, a way to interculturality

Interculturality is a type of relation that is intentionally established between cultures. It propounds dialogue and meeting between cultures based on the mutual recognition of their respective values and ways of life. This attitude encourages the development of social values (Dictionary of key terms in Spanish as a Foreign Language). This relation can occur among members of the same community using the same language or among members of different communities by using a different language. Thus, establishing this sort of relation requires a certain degree of plurilingualism or multilingualism; the former is considered to be the simultaneous presence of two or more languages in the communicative competence of a person and the inter-relation established among people, and the latter is the knowledge of various languages or the coexistence of different languages in a particular society.

This way the simultaneous development of plurilingualism or multilingualism and interculturality becomes a natural process, as the linguistic and cultural competencies associated with each language interact, becoming enriched by knowledge of the other language and contributing to the development of intercultural attitudes (Dictionary of key terms in Spanish as a Foreign Language).

Spain has various official languages. Apart from Spanish itself, some of the self-governing autonomous communities in Spain have their own official language: Catalan, Valencian, Galician, Basque and Aranese. In addition, other languages exist, though they are not considered official: Aragonese and Astur-Leonese (Bable in Asturias; and Leonese in Leon and Zamora).

Spanish is also the official language of Equatorial Guinea as well as of many Latin American countries (Argentine, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Uruguay, Dominican Republic). Spanish is also spoken in other countries, including the United States and the Philippines. This has resulted in an important flow of immigrants from these Spanish-speaking countries.

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