Free Guide Helps Address Language Access Issues

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A new guide produced by the California Academy of Family Physicians aims to bridge the gap between physicians and patients with limited English proficiency.

"Nationwide—but particularly in states like California, New York, Texas, Florida, Nevada, and Georgia—we are experiencing record increases in the number of limited English-speaking patients," Alice Chen, M.D., medical director of the general medicine clinic at San Francisco General Hospital, told this newspaper. "In some of those states, the number tripled between the 1990 and 2000 census."

The document, "Addressing Language Access in Your Practice: A Toolkit for Physicians and Their Staff Members," aims "to focus on the practical things that you can do in your clinic, and it gives you a whole range of options depending on the size of your clinic, the type of patient population you have, and your resources," said Dr. Chen, who helped develop the guide.

The tool kit is organized into three steps meant to help physicians coordinate and implement a solution to potential language barriers in their practices.

► Step 1: Identify your limited–English-proficiency patient population.

► Step 2: Locate relevant resources in your area, and assess each for your type of practice.

► Step 3: Implement the right mix of services for your practice and patient population. ■

The tool kit can be downloaded free at www.familydocs.org/ALA_toolkit.pdf.

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