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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Under NY State's New Hospital Language Assistance Law

On September 13, 2006, new communication assistance regulations went into effect for all private and public hospitals throughout New York State. The new rules are intended to improve your access to health care and protect you from medical harm from communication problems in hospitals. If your ability to communicate in English is limited, or if you are hearing- or vision-impaired, you have a right to free communication assistance and should expect the following when you go into any hospital:

The hospital must:

- ◆ Ask you about your language preference during your first visit, and communicate with you in your language. The hospital should be ready to help you in your language if you visit again.
- ◆ Provide an interpreter *for free* who is skilled in your language.
- ◆ Make an interpreter available for as long as you need help communicating with hospital staff. The hospital may use bilingual staff, telephonic communication services and/or in-person interpreters to meet your communication needs.
- ◆ Have information available telling you how to access free language assistance services.
- ◆ Post signs telling you about the hospital's free language assistance services.
- ◆ Explain your bill, insurance information and financial assistance options in your language.
- ◆ NOT use anyone under the age of 16 to be your interpreter.
- ◆ Provide interpreter services *even if* a family member and/or friend goes with you to the hospital for emotional support and to help you make decisions about your health care.

IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING HAS HAPPENED TO YOU, in the New York City area please contact the **New York Lawyers for the Public Interest at 212-244-4664 (ask for Nisha Agarwal)**. We can help you to get better care and will work with hospitals to improve services and correct violations.

If you:

- ◆ Were **told that the hospital could not assist you in your language.**
- ◆ Were **not offered a free interpreter** even though you do not speak enough English to communicate about medical matters.
- ◆ Were **forced to wait for a long time to see a doctor because you requested an interpreter, or because the hospital did not understand your language.**
- ◆ Were **asked to bring your own interpreter** with you to your appointment, or if the **hospital asked a family member or person in the waiting room to be your interpreter.**
- ◆ Could **not understand what people at the hospital said to you** because they did not communicate in your language.
- ◆ Were **asked to sign papers that you could not understand** because the papers were not translated into your language.
- ◆ Were **provided with an interpreter who did not speak your language well enough to discuss medical matters.**

**Hospitals are not permitted to discriminate based on language, race, or immigration status.
Hospitals DO NOT share information with immigration agents.**