

The Right To Understand



Imagine seeking medical care only to find that you are a stranger in a strange land, a place where you don't speak the language. You don't understand the doctors or nurses and they don't understand you. This is neither a theoretical problem nor a transient one.

Perhaps as much as a third of the population of this city lacks the language skills for basic medical care, let alone complex jargon of advanced medical terminology. This city is home to elderly Russian immigrants who never absorbed the language, Arabs who lack sufficient command of Hebrew, and Ethiopians whose culture is so vastly different that modern medicine is foreign to them. Recent studies show that 73% of Hadassah Hospital's own staff recognize that communication difficulties hamper good medical care.

The right to healthcare is a fundamental human right, and it includes your right to understand your medical condition and that of your loved one.





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In 2010, with the support of the Jerusalem Foundation and the Sobell Foundation, the Jerusalem Intercultural Center trained staff from Clalit Health Services, Alyn Pediatric and Adolescent Rehabilitation Center, and the Hadassah Hospital. The training was focused on language and translation services, appreciating cultural differences and how they impact health care choices.

The issue has received significant press attention. In an investigative report, the Jerusalem Post noted the vacuum left by the Health Ministry in providing translating services. The JICC has leaped into the breach, finding solutions to this complex problem, giving every patient the inalienable right to understand.

