

CASE STUDY:

Northern Health Virtual Emergency Interpreting Trial

Ongoing collaboration between All Graduates Interpreting and Translating Service and Northern Health's Virtual Emergency Department has resulted in successful health consultations for multicultural patients seeking emergency medical support.

Video interpreting has become increasingly popular as a service platform since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic in March 2020, with many services being provided on a pre-booked basis. However, in late 2021, Northern Health sought an 'on demand' interpreting solution to cut wait times and provide interpreting needs on a reliable, real-time basis.

All Graduates has a large pool of trained video interpreters across a wide range of languages spoken within the Northern Health and surrounding catchment areas. As an early adopter of video interpreting technologies, All Graduates has spearheaded service delivery via video platforms for a decade, and offers an established and highly capable interpreting cohort to support client needs.

From December 2021, Northern Health and All Graduates articulated an On Demand Video Interpreting workflow and implemented a pilot arrangement to the end of February 2022, which achieved an effective fill rate of 98.5% of confirmed bookings, which exceeds common industry benchmarks.



The workflow includes the use of customised online booking forms which are actioned immediately by All Graduates on receipt, with connection times being 10 minutes for Arabic interpreters and 20 minutes for all other languages, as agreed key performance indicators. All Graduates communicate responsively with Clinicians by telephone and email to provide booking confirmation status, and to connect the video call.

During the pilot, 66 video-interpreted services were delivered in the following languages:

Arabic (70% of all services)	Assyrian Neo-Aramaic	Greek	Macedonian	Mandarin
Nepalese	Oromo	Persian	Punjabi	Serbian
	Thai	Turkish	Vietnamese	

Services were available across a broad span of hours ranging from 8:30am to 11:30pm Monday to Sunday.* During the trial, nearly 70% of services were requested between the hours of 2pm and 8pm, and over 95% of services went for more than 20 minutes (with 40% of these interactions lasting for between 50 and 120 minutes). Feedback on the service has consistently been positive, with doctors citing ease of use and rapid response times:

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I have used it twice now and has worked well both times! They were very quick (got one in under 5 mins) and the online form was easy to use.

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In addition, these services are valued as they are able to be arranged at short notice, and a wider range of interpreting professionals can be sourced from metropolitan and regional locations around the country. Video interpreting technology has enormous potential to improve service access, delivery and flexibility, and reduce costs. Over time, the further rollout of this capability will make consultations between any health professional, patient and interpreter in any location around the country a real possibility.

As has been found in earlier initiatives in health settings¹, in situations when onsite interpreting is not possible, culturally diverse patients prefer accessing interpreters via video conferencing rather than telephone, as they value the ability to see and interact with their interpreter rather than relying on voice communication only. Interpreters have also expressed their satisfaction with the user-friendly technology and ease of access to the video platform, with no additional software, effort or expertise required to connect to the video conference.

The trial is ongoing, and as the default service provider for meeting on demand video requests, All Graduates looks forward to continued collaboration with Northern Health to support the healthcare needs of diverse clients.

¹Melbourne Health (Royal Melbourne Hospital) Telehealth Initiative: Schulz TR, Leder K, Akinci I and Biggs B-A (2015), Improvements in patient care: videoconferencing to improve access to interpreters during clinical consultations for refugee and immigrant patients, Australian Health Review 39(4), pp395-399, 23 March

*UPDATE: Following the success of the trial, the virtual ED service is now available 24 hours, 7 days a week.