

Bulletin

HHS Office for Civil Rights Ensures Expanded Language Assistance Services at Shenandoah Memorial Hospital

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and Shenandoah Memorial Hospital (SMH) have signed a voluntary resolution agreement to expand language assistance services for limited English proficient (LEP) persons. Located in Woodstock, Virginia, SMH is one of seven critical access hospitals in the state.

This voluntary resolution agreement follows from a compliance review OCR initiated under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under the agreement, SMH will take a number of critical steps to ensure persons with limited English proficiency can access services including: assessing the demographics of its service area; establishing and implementing policies for professional interpreters and translated documents; designating a language assistance coordinator; developing and implementing a checklist to ensure that all major aspects of the patient encounter are translated; posting signs stating that interpreter services are available free of charge; and conducting employee training and consumer outreach.

Language assistance services are essential to meaningful access to quality health care. If providers and patients do not understand each other clearly and cannot communicate effectively, quality of care is compromised, sometimes even jeopardized. This voluntary resolution agreement demonstrates the benefits of hospitals working cooperatively with OCR to ensure Title VI compliance.

Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in any program that receives Federal financial assistance. Title VI requires that recipients of Federal funds, like SMH, take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and services by LEP persons. As such, failure to take such reasonable steps may constitute a violation of Title VI.

A copy of the voluntary resolution agreement may be found at:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/activities/agreements/index.html>.

If a person feels that a health care or human services provider receiving federal financial assistance from HHS, or a state or local government agency, has discriminated against him or her (or someone else) on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, or in certain circumstances, sex, or religion, he or she may file a discrimination complaint with the HHS Office for Civil Rights at

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/complaints/index.html>.