

Chinese Hospital Participates in Announcement of Multi-lingual Prescription Drug Information Bill

Flanked by health care advocates at a Sunset District center specializing in care for Chinese-speaking seniors, Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco) announced new legislation helping 6.5 million Californians with limited English proficiency to understand their medications by requiring pharmacists to distribute standardized translations of drug information materials.

“Healthcare access requires effective communication between patients and the medical professionals treating them,” said Ting. “Failure to understand prescriptions causes preventable tragedies. By ensuring that all patients understand their medications, we will save lives and improve healthcare for millions of Californians.”

Sponsored by the California Board of Pharmacy, Ting’s Assembly Bill (AB) 1073 will improve patient access to prescription drug information in their primary languages through the following provisions.

- The Board of Pharmacy must make available and post on its website standardized translated directions on all prescription medications in at least 5 languages other than English.
- Pharmacists must use these standardized translations and, since many pharmacists cannot personally authenticate the materials, the bill would limit their liability for inadvertent errors in their use.
- Pharmacists already providing patients with their own translated directions are encouraged to continue.

“Culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare is fundamental for patient health and well-being,” said Andy Bryant, COO at Self Help for the Elderly, which hosted today’s announcement and provides health, housing, and wellness services. “By making it easier for seniors to understand their medications, they can focus on enjoying their golden years with dignity and grace.”

“We at Chinese Hospital feel this is a valuable bill for not only our Chinese speaking community but all the other community members we serve with limited English proficiency,” said Diane Hong, Pharmacist at Chinese Hospital. “This bill will help people properly take their medications and ensure they get the benefit of the drugs as their doctors intended.”

“Patients often misunderstand instructions for their medication,” said Sarah de Guia, Executive Director of the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network. “These misunderstandings are only exacerbated for California’s Limited English Proficient patients. This bill will help make prescription labels understandable and meaningful for millions of Californians.” California is the most linguistically diverse state in the nation. The 2010 U.S. Census found over 6.5 million Californians speak English less than “very well.” And, 44 percent of Californians speak a language other than English at home. In San Francisco, according to the 2014 Language Access Ordinance Report, 36 percent of residents are immigrants. 45 percent over the age of 5 speak a language other than English

at home – mostly Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Russian. Thirteen percent of households remain linguistically isolated, meaning no one over the age of 14 speaks English “well” or “very well.”

Prompted by a 2007 state law, the Board developed standardized, patient-centered prescription labels with simplified drug use directions and improved font sizing. The Board also developed online information tools to confront language access challenges that have not been used by pharmacists due to liability concerns over inadvertent errors.

Further information about AB 1073 is available at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov>.