I. Purpose.

This document is intended to satisfy the requirements set forth in California Business and Professions code 2190.1. California law requires physicians to obtain training in cultural and linguistic competency as part of their continuing medical education and professional development programs. This document and the accompanying attachments are intended to provide physicians with an overview of federal and state laws regarding linguistic access and services for limited English proficient (“LEP”) persons. The document is not comprehensive and there may be additional federal and state laws governing the manner in which physicians and healthcare providers render services for disabled, hearing impaired or other protected categories. We recommend that physicians review the CMA California Physician’s Legal Handbook for a comprehensive review of laws affecting a physician’s medical practice in California.


The Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, and HHS regulations require recipients of federal financial assistance to take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP persons have meaningful access to federally funded programs and services. HHS recently issued revised guidance documents for Recipients to ensure that they understand their obligations to provide language assistance services to LEP persons. A copy of HHS’s summary document entitled “Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI and the Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons – Summary” is attached for your review. Additional in-depth guidance is available at HHS’s website at: [http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/lep/](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/lep/).

As noted above, Recipients generally must provide meaningful access to their programs and services for LEP persons. The rule, however, is a flexible one and HHS recognizes that “reasonable steps” may differ depending on the Recipient’s size and scope of services. HHS advised that Recipients, in designing an LEP program, should conduct an individualized assessment balancing four factors, including: (i) the number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or by the Recipient; (ii) the frequency with which
LEP individuals come into contact with the Recipient’s program; (iii) the nature and importan
tce of the program, activity or service provided by the Recipient; and (iv) the resources
available to the Recipient and the costs of interpreting and translation services.

Based on the Recipient’s analysis, the Recipient should then design an LEP plan based on five
recommended steps, including: (i) identifying LEP individuals who may need assistance;
(ii) identifying language assistance measures; (iii) training staff; (iv) providing notice to
LEP persons; and (v) monitoring and updating the LEP plan.

A Recipient’s LEP plan likely will include translating vital documents and providing either
on-site interpreters or telephone interpreter services, or using shared interpreting services
with other Recipients. Recipients may take other reasonable steps, such as hiring bilingual
staff who are competent in the skills required for medical translation, hiring staff
interpreters, or contracting with outside public or private agencies that provide
interpreter services.


The California legislature enacted the California’s Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act
(Govt. Code 7290 et seq.) in order to ensure that California residents would appropriately
receive services from public agencies regardless of the person’s English language
skills. California Government Code section 7291 recites this legislative intent as follows:

The Act generally requires state and local public agencies to provide interpreter and
written document translation services in a manner that will ensure that LEP individuals
have access to important government services. Agencies may employ bilingual staff, and
translate documents into additional languages representing the clientele served by the
agency. Public agencies also must conduct a needs assessment survey every two years
documenting the items listed in Government Code section 7299.4, and develop an
implementation plan every year that documents compliance with the Act. A copy of this
law may be found at the following url: http://www.spb.ca.gov/bilingual/dymallyact.htm