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Patients with language barriers take almost twice as long to get to the hospital

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Researchers analyzed English comprehension among 210 patients at four New York City hospitals who suffered heart attacks with a heart artery completely blocked. Doctors often refer to this type of heart attack as a STEMI, for ST-elevation myocardial infarction.

In follow-up telephone interviews, 34 of the patients (16.2 percent) spoke no English (65 percent spoke Spanish; 6 percent Russian; 6 percent Chinese; 23 percent spoke another language).

The patients who reported they understood no English took almost twice as long to get to the hospital compared to those who considered their English fluency fair or good. Adjusting for age, gender, ethnicity, education level and existence of other illnesses, the inability to understand English remained a strong determinant of how long it took patients to get to the hospital.

Researchers conclude the results underscore a need for more multi-lingual education on heart attacks, symptoms and the importance of calling 9-1-1 and getting to the hospital quickly. They also recommend multi-lingual emergency lines so that non-English speakers can get the information they need quickly.

Provided by American Heart Association

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