Top translator apps can help you communicate with patients who have limited English proficiency

↻ Add these medical phrase and general language translator apps to your clinician's toolkit

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As the population of patients with limited English proficiency increases throughout English-speaking countries, health care providers often need translator services. Medical translator smartphone applications (apps) are useful tools that can provide ad hoc translator services.

According to the US Census Bureau in 2015, more than 60 million individuals—about 19% of Americans—reported speaking a language other than English at home, and more than 25 million said that they speak English "less than very well."[1,2] The top 5 non-English languages spoken at home were Spanish, French, Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese, encompassing 72% of non-English speakers.

In the health care sector, translator services are essential for providing accurate and culturally competent care. Current options for translator services include face-to-face interpreters, phone-based translator services, and translator apps on mobile devices. In settings where face-to-face interpreters or phone-based translator services are not available, translator apps may provide reasonable alternatives. My colleagues, Dr. Amrin Khander and Dr. Sara Farag, and I identified and evaluated medical translator apps that are available from the Apple iTunes and Google Play stores to aid clinicians in using such apps during clinical encounters.[3]

Three types of translator apps

Preset medical phrase translator apps require the user to search for or find a question or statement in order to facilitate a conversation. With these types of apps, a health care provider can choose fully conjugated sentences, which then can be played or read back to the patient in the chosen translated language. Within this group of apps, Canopy Speak and Universal Doctor Speaker are highly accessible, since both apps are available from the Apple iTunes and Google Play stores and both are free.

Medical dictionary apps require the user to search for a medical term in one language to receive a translation in another language. These apps are less useful, but they can help providers find and define specific terms in a given language.

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TABLE Top recommended translator applications

App	App comprehensiveness	Price	Platform	Literature used	Important special features
Canopy Speak iTunes: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/canopy-speak/id792808936?mt=8 Google Play: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.canopyapps.translator&hl=en	• Preset medical phrase translator app • 15 languages	Free	iTunes and Google Play store	None reported	• Subspecialty specific • Displays phrases with text • Plays with audio • Allows dial-out to a phone interpreter
Google Translate iTunes: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/google-translate/id414706506?mt=8 Google Play: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.google.android.apps.translate&hl=en	• General language translator app • At least 30 languages with important special features • Over 100 languages with display phrases with text	Free	iTunes and Google Play store	None reported	• Displays phrases with text • Plays with audio • Translates text in images instantly by just pointing or taking photo with your phone camera • Translates bilingual conversations on the fly • Draws text characters instead of typing
Universal Doctor Speaker iTunes: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/universal-doctor-speaker-medical-translator-with-audios/id389202856?mt=8 Google Play: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.universaldoctor.drspeaker&hl=en	• Preset medical phrase translator app • 17 languages	Free	iTunes and Google Play store	None listed	• Subspecialty specific • Displays phrases with text • Plays with audio
Vocre Translate iTunes: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/vocre-translate-voice-and-text-translator/id454405637?mt=8 Google Play: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.Vocre.Translate&hl=en	• General language translator app • 36 languages	$4.99	iTunes and Google Play store	None reported	• Displays phrases with text • Plays with audio • Translates bilingual conversations on the fly

General language translator apps require the user to enter a term, statement, or question in one language and then provide a translation in another language. Google Translate and Vocre Translate are examples.

The top recommended translator apps are listed in the **TABLE** alphabetically and are detailed with a shortened version of the APPLICATIONS scoring system, APPLI (app comprehensiveness, price, platform, literature use, and important special features).[4] I hope the apps described here will help you enhance communication with your patients who have limited English proficiency. ⊘

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