

# Use of Translation Tools (Machine Translation) for Non-Medical Translation in Clinical Settings

## Site Applicability

All VCH sites and care settings

*Note: 'Patient' refers to patient, client or resident in this document*

## Practice Level

Profession	Basic Skill
All Staff	Understanding of when utilization of translation tools for non-medical patient needs is appropriate in clinical settings

## Requirements

Use translation tools described in this document in clinical settings only for non-medical conversations with patients who have limited English language skills, as a means to offer better communication. VCH staff will follow this document and the protocol and policy documents of Provincial Language Services (PLS): [Accessing Interpreting and Translation Services in PHSA](#).

## Need to Know

Interpretation is needed in clinical settings for patients with limited English language skills. Information requiring translation is considered either medical or non-medical. Non-medical information is considered a transactional conversation where the information exchange does not require an understanding of tone, content is simple versus complex and requires yes, no, or simple responses. Generally, these conversations pertain to activities of daily living.

There are a variety of translation tools (machine translation) that are easy to access and user friendly that can be utilized to address non-medical translation needs. These tools are offered through website interface and mobile apps for Android and iOS, and are suitable for non-medical needs only as they do not meet privacy and confidentiality standards for medical information purposes. For example, many of these apps store personally identifiable information on external databases or servers outside of Canada, which is currently not permitted for public bodies under BC's *Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act*. Additionally, machine translation has been shown to be inaccurate at translating medical terms and phrases, and therefore should not be used for these purposes.

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## Equipment and Supplies

1. A computer, smartphone or tablet that can access the internet or cellular data networks
2. A website or mobile app that performs translations. There are many applications available that provide machine translation. The following applications are recommended for non-medical information as they are easy to use and have a high rate of successful translation:

• Google Translate	• Microsoft Translate	• iTranslate
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## Assessment/Intervention

- Assess whether patient has limited English language skills. Patient will benefit from using a translation tool if any of the following applies:
  - Your patient answers *yes or no*, even to open-ended questions
  - Your patient cannot explain any of the following:
    - Explain why they are here; describe their basic health concern; cannot answer follow-up questions
- Using the guide below, assess whether information to be communicated is medical or non-medical.
- If information to be communicated is non-medical, initiate use of translation tools available online or via smartphone app.
- If information to be communicated is medical, apply standard guidelines for accessing PLS.

Medical Information	Non-Medical Information
Types of information suitable for a qualified in-person translator (oral: in-person, audio, virtual)	Types of information suitable for mobile apps and website translation tools, family/volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of any patient identifiers</li> <li>• Informed consent for treatment or research:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information review</li> <li>○ Obtaining consent</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Exchange of key medical information               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Medical history, medical record</li> <li>○ Medical exam/assessments</li> <li>○ Medical diagnosis</li> <li>○ Treatment options/plan or diagnosis</li> <li>○ Treatment and care decisions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Legal and privacy information</li> <li>• Education of medical condition or care</li> <li>• Highly emotional content is involved               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For example: Discussing a poor prognosis and goals of care decisions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stigmatized content is involved</li> <li>• Mood or tone is required in conversation</li> </ul>	<p>Transactional conversation with patient pertaining to activities of daily living:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal</li> <li>• No mood or tone is required</li> <li>• Simple “Yes” or “No” responses by client are acceptable responses to open or closed-ended questions.</li> </ul> <p>Examples to reflect above include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you need to go to the bathroom?</li> <li>• Have you gone to the bathroom today?</li> <li>• Can you sit at the side of the bed?</li> <li>• Have you eaten today?</li> <li>• When is your family coming in?</li> <li>• Do you want some water?</li> <li>• Have you finished your food?</li> <li>• Would you like something to read?</li> </ul>

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## Documentation

Document the need for an interpreter and type of translation tool required to communicate with the patient in their medical record.

## Patient and Family Education

Inform patient and family that more than one type of interpreter tool may be used based on whether the need is for translation of medical or non-medical information.

## Related Documents

VCH and PHC: [Acceptable Use of Information Technology \(BD-00-11-40001\)](#)

## Definitions

- App – short for application – a program or piece of software designed and written to fulfill a particular purpose of the user.

## References

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