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Language barriers in Swiss hospitals

- 40% of the people living in Switzerland have a migration background (Federal Statistics Office, 2024)
- 74% of the nurses in hospitals encounter often or daily patients with whom they cannot communicate in German (Dibrani & Vukadin, 2023)
- 73% of the midwives have often or sometimes contact with allophone patients (Laukart & Grilli, 2021)
- 36% of the family doctors see at least once per week a patient who does not speak the official language sufficiently well (Jaeger et al., 2019)

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Communication challenges

« The main problem is that we cannot understand each other. That means that I cannot respond to the needs of the patient and / or they do not understand their analyses which leads to problems during nursing.»

Dibrani & Vukadin, 2021; response no. 71

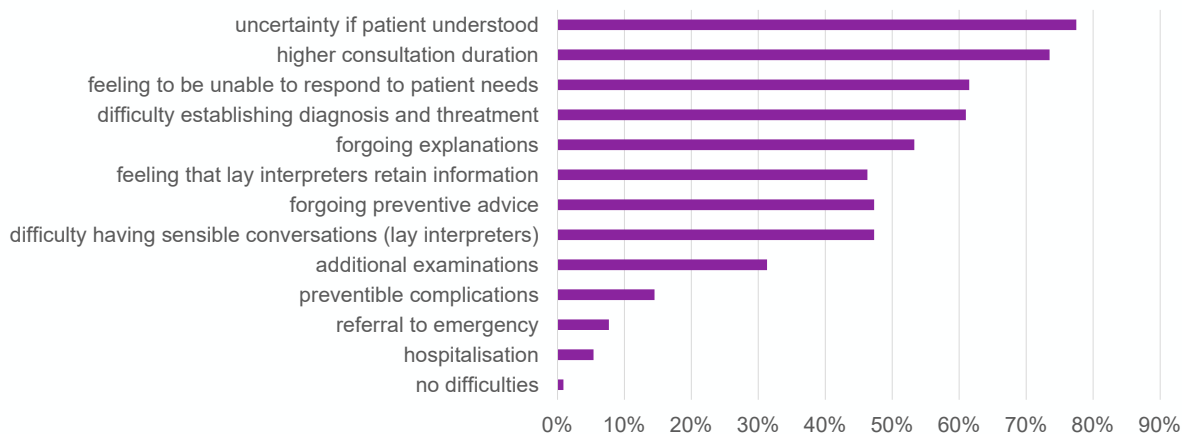
- Difficulties to communicate (25)
- Difficulties assessing symptoms or taking history (14)
- Important information is not understood (10)
- Healthcare professional can't respond to patient's needs (9)
- Misunderstandings (8)
- Feeling of uncertainty (5)
- **Reduced communication (4)**
- **Time-consuming (4)**
- Patient can't express their needs (4)
- Lack of trust (2)
- Support of others necessary (1)

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Impact on family doctors



Jaeger et al., 2019

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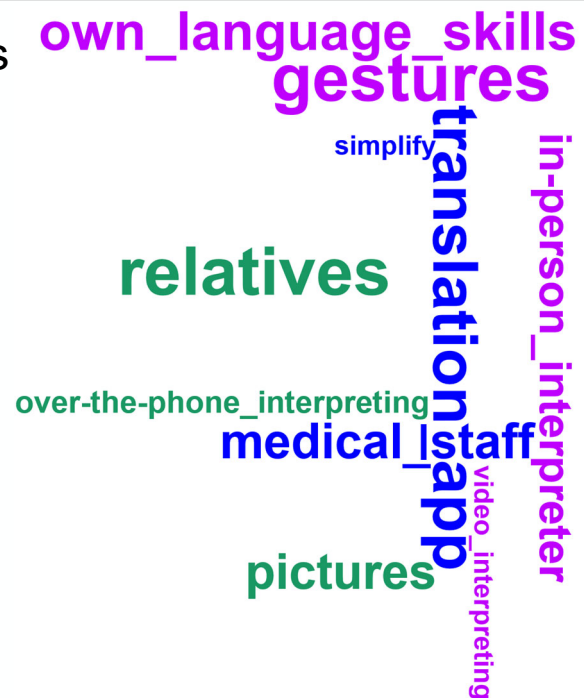
Overcoming language barriers

(summarizing AMIT, Laukart & Grilli, 2021, Grond, 2022; Lehr & Gieshoff, 2022 und Jaeger et al, 2019)

Main communication strategies

- Machine translation
- Relatives as lay interpreters
- Nonverbal communication / gestures

> Qualified interpreters are called only rarely



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Challenges when using translation apps

«I think you need some intellectual skills to use these tools because you need to know how to formulate a sentence in different ways and not everybody is able to that.»

(Lehr & Gieshoff, 2022; I2, 07:21)

Mentioned by at least 3 participants:

- Risk of mistranslations (8)
- Nuances are lost (4)
- Tedious and time-consuming (4)
- Lack of data protection (3)
- Translation apps as «communicative barrier» (3)
- Requires cognitive skills (3)

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Machine translation vs. (qualified) interpreters

Machine translation	No trend / unclear	(qualified) interpreters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-being, simple medical questions (65:4) • Information on up-coming treatment or nursing activities (30:10) • Appointments and every-day communication (17:4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission and discharge, ward round (22:34) • Anamnesis and consultation for simple cases (18:32) • Patient education (8:14) • Unclear (18:54) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency, no alternative (8:34) • Complex case and consent (7:140) • Long and complex conversations (0:40) • Meetings with relatives (0:66)

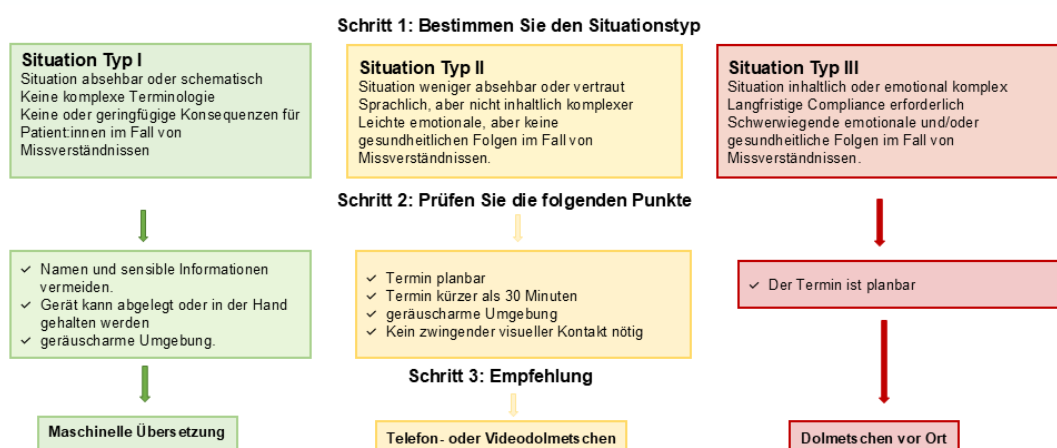
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Categories mentioned by > 20 respondents
Source: Grond, 2022

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Decision tree



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Lehr & Gieshoff, 2022

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DigiLinguo: Overcoming language barriers in public institutions

Test track

Testing of digital translation tools



Meet-ups

Stakeholder events and networking



Online-training platform for interpreters and trainers

Teaching material



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Thank you for your attention!



More about DigiLinguo



More about the decision tree ¹⁰

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