

Improving communication with patients who speak English as a second language by using Pocketalk, an AI-powered handheld interpretation device.

Living Well Partnership



8

GP surgeries across Eastern Southampton.



45,000

population size.



13%

of registered patients not English-speaking.

SETTING AND CHALLENGE

Living Well Partnership is a Southampton-based primary care network (PCN). With a 45,000-strong patient population representing over 70 foreign languages, the team faces daily challenges in communicating effectively with patients who speak English as a second language (ESL).

Although an existing telephone-based interpretation service is in place, staff report several challenges with this:

- Telephone wait times can create unwelcome delays.
- There is a limited pool of interpreters for rarer languages.
- Telephone interpreting necessitates longer appointments
- Handheld phones have been replaced with headsets, making the interpretation process cumbersome.

SOLUTION

SCALE Innovation are the exclusive healthcare partners of Pocketalk, a handheld AI-powered interpretation device.

Pocketalk communicates in over 85 languages by detecting speech and providing instant translations audibly through a speaker and visually on a screen.

Using an NIHR-funded grant, we worked with Living Well Partnership to conduct a real-world evidence study over five months. The research question was:

“How can the Pocketalk translation device impact care delivery in primary care triage settings for patients who do not speak English?”

We made Pocketalk devices available to Living Well’s surgeries, to help them communicate with ESL patients.



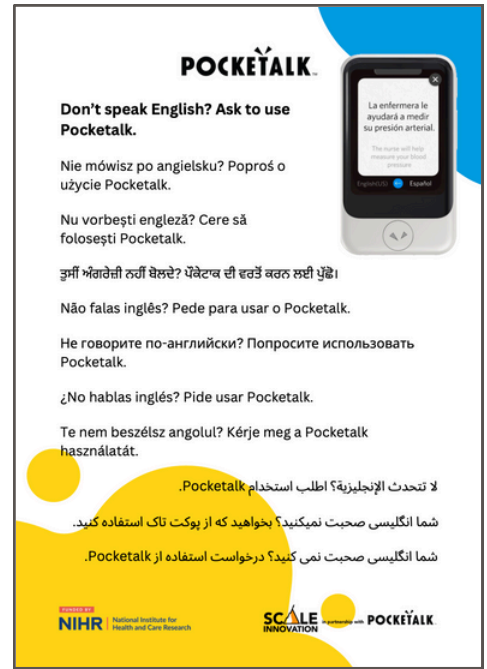
IMPLEMENTATION



Before go-live, we created a multilingual poster that was used to inform ESL patients that Pocketalk was available. The posters were displayed in prominent locations around the participating surgeries.

Patients were given the opportunity to use a telephone-based interpreter if they wished. This service was commissioned by the Integrated Care Board. Those choosing to use Pocketalk were assured that it was secure, and that no record of their conversation would be stored, either on the device or in the cloud.

Comprehensive in-person training sessions were held to ensure that all participating staff felt confident and proficient using Pocketalk in daily interactions.



Multilingual patient poster

THE PROJECT WAS DEPLOYED IN THREE PHASES:

1

Front Desk

Firstly, we introduced Pocketalk into front desk (reception) patient interactions. This area was a key point where ESL patients arrive without notice, requiring a wide range of support.

2

Nurse-led Scenarios

In the second phase, we introduced Pocketalk into routine nurse-led scenarios, enabling us to test the device in a clinical setting while maintaining a low level of language complexity.

3

Pharmacy

Finally, we extended the project to local adjoining pharmacies, which encounter many of the same language-related challenges as their general practice colleagues.



A mixed methods approach was used to gather feedback, combining simple online impact surveys for both staff and patients with face-to-face interviews conducted at the project's conclusion.

Health Innovation Wessex provided expert input and advice on the study design, implementation and data collection.

RESULTS



5 Months 

100 sessions 

12 hours of interpretation 

18 languages 

3 Primary Care Settings 

“**Improved relationships.**

Increased patient privacy.

More efficient consultations.

Improved workflow.”

HEADLINE IMPACTS



The staff impact survey was completed 30 times. This is not reflective of the number of *actual* Pocketalk uses, since staff did not always have time to complete the form after every use. We estimate that Pocketalk was used in approximately 80 to 100 separate instances throughout the project.

100% of respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the following statements:

- “Using Pocketalk was an acceptable way to help me communicate with my patient.”
- “Using Pocketalk was a safe way to help me communicate with my patient.”
- “I trust Pocketalk enough to use it again.”

93% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “Using Pocketalk was easy.”

83% of respondents either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement “I would prefer to use a telephone-based system to interpret.”

COMMON THEMES FROM ALL STAFF GROUPS



- Pocketalk significantly reduced the communication burden with ESL patients, who often displayed relief and satisfaction, improving communication effectiveness.
- Minor technical issues, like connectivity problems, were generally resolved with further training.
- While users couldn’t verify interpretation accuracy, positive patient body language suggested effective communication.
- Pocketalk saved time compared to telephone services, which often involved long wait times.
- Staff reported higher satisfaction and less anxiety from delivering better quality care and addressing patients’ needs more immediately.



SPECIFIC THEMES - NURSING

- Nurses appreciated Pocketalk's immediate translation support, which was faster than telephone services or Google Translate.
- It worked well for basic consultations, such as vaccinations or simple queries, but its suitability for complex scenarios remained uncertain.
- Consultations were faster due to Pocketalk's immediacy, allowing nurses to spend more time with patients, strengthening relationships without third-party involvement.
- With the recent removal of physical telephones from consultation rooms, some nurses were unsure if the telephone-based interpreting service was still available, so welcomed the availability of Pocketalk.



SPECIFIC THEMES - PHARMACY

- Some patients used alternatives like Google Translate, but Pocketalk was considered more professional compared to personal mobile apps.
- Pocketalk facilitated non-clinical conversations, helping to reduce health inequalities (E.g., informing a patient about pre-paying for prescriptions to save money).
- Pharmacists reported enhanced customer service and greater opportunities to boost product sales, thanks to improved communication.
- Workflow efficiency improved, reducing time spent with each patient and managing queues more effectively.
- Patients responded positively, often expressing relief and gratitude for clearer communication and privacy, especially when discussing sensitive issues.
- Pharmacists often interact with the same patients, and believed that Pocketalk would help to strengthen relationships between them and the communities that they serve.

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SELECTED FEEDBACK



“Very straightforward and accurate.”

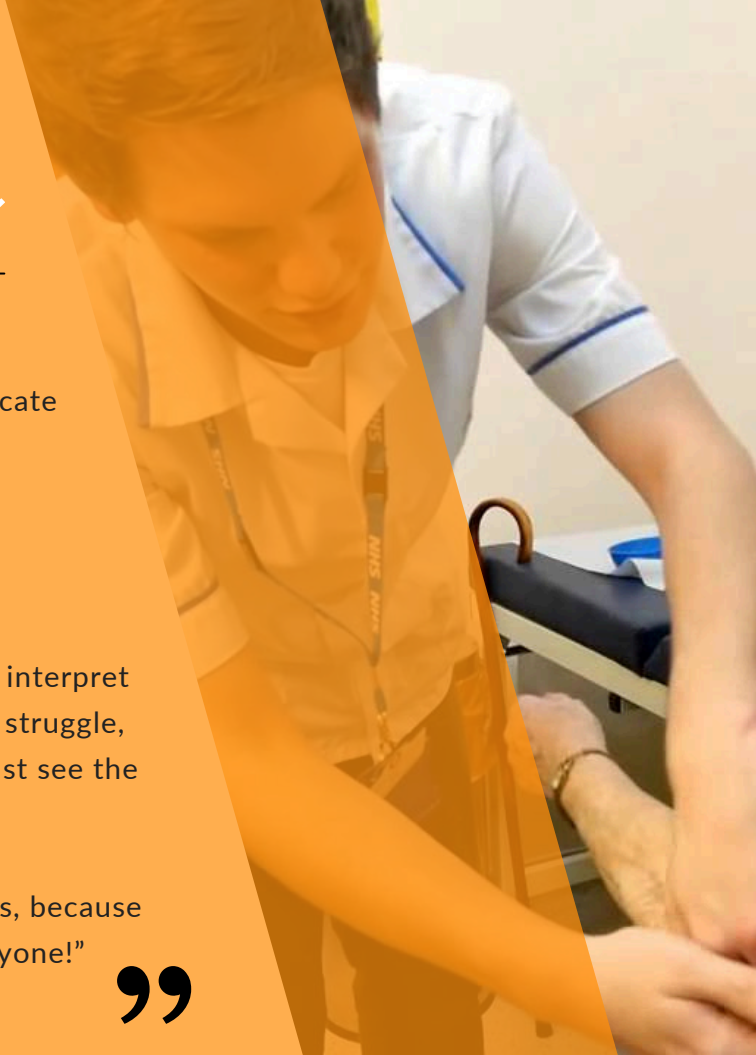
“It was great using Pocketalk. I was able to communicate with the patient easily.”

“I loved it. It was so easy and much quicker than contacting a translator via phone.”

“Patients don’t expect to have something like this to interpret for them. So they come in thinking they are going to struggle, and when they see how easy Pocketalk is, you can just see the big smile on their face.”

“Now when I’m at front desk, I don’t care who arrives, because I’ve got Pocketalk to translate. Now I’m ready for anyone!”

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CONCLUSION



The introduction of Pocketalk into Living Well Partnership PCN demonstrated clear improvements in communication between healthcare staff and patients who speak English as a second language. The device proved to be an effective, time-saving solution compared to traditional telephone-based interpreting services, enhancing both patient satisfaction and staff confidence. Over 100 sessions in 18 different languages highlighted the device’s potential to bridge communication gaps, leading to more efficient consultations, better workflow management, and improved patient relationships.

While Pocketalk excelled in routine and non-complex scenarios, further exploration is needed to assess its suitability in more challenging consultations. However, the overwhelmingly positive feedback from front desk staff, nurses and pharmacists underscores its value in primary care settings. The deployment of Pocketalk has not only facilitated faster, more effective communication but also contributed to reducing health inequalities and increasing patient privacy.



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