

Canopy: a medical translation app

Professional interpreters perform an integral role in the medical setting, ensuring that clinician-patient interactions are understood from both sides. As essential as they are, however, we have all experienced scenarios where we have been left, to our own devices, so to speak! Emergencies happen, administrative errors occur, and invariably important information can be lost in translation.

A new smartphone app is poised to improve our interactions with patients by helping to break down the ever-challenging language barrier.

The Canopy Medical Translator (iOS, Apple App Store) is an exciting option for medical professionals hoping to communicate more effectively with patients who are not native English speakers.

The Canopy app includes 1500 common medical phrases, all of which have been carefully translated from English into 13 languages (and counting). The phrases range from questions ('do you feel like the room is spinning?'), to instructions ('I'm going to take a look in your ears now'), to explanations of test results ('the CT scan is normal'). The

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translations are displayed on the screen as text and are also played as audio.

Within the app, the phrases are categorised by medical specialty (e.g. general surgery, internal medicine) and phrase type (e.g. greetings, history, physical exam, etc.). Alternatively, you can search for specific phrases by doing a keyword search. Users can access lists of most used and recently used phrases, or can create their own lists. There is also an option to enter the phone number for local translation services at your institution through the app.

At time of press, the app is available for free in limited quantities. The app comes with Spanish already installed. Other languages can be purchased (\$9.99 USD each) or can be unlocked for free by sharing the app with other health care professionals.

Some readers are probably asking themselves: why not just use Google Translate? For the uninitiated, Google Translate allows users on any platform to complete direct translations in over 80 languages. The sheer number of words available for translation in each language is astounding. However, as the makers of Canopy are happy to point out, the meaning of a sentence can be altered considerably when words are translated on an individual basis and misunderstandings resulting from translation errors can have serious consequences.

The drawback of Canopy is that its phrase catalogue might not be comprehensive enough for some physicians. Some of the standard ENT case history questions (e.g. 'do you have pressure or fullness in your ears?'), and common procedures (e.g. cerumen management) do not have accompanying translations within the app. Of course, once the message has been delivered, translating the reply remains a problem! This is a major drawback of any medical translation system and has as yet evaded a simple solution. It seems that Canopy and Google Translate might best be used in parallel, at least until the Canopy phrase catalogue expands sufficiently to satisfy the majority of medical professionals. – CF