Ethically Speaking:
Spanish Bilingual Medical Student Certification
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Rationale
- Since 2000, the Department of Health and Human Services has mandated that health care providers assure patient safety through competent language assistance at all levels of care.
- Bilingual medical students frequently provide direct patient care and interpret for their teams.
- The current medical education system lacks a standardized method to evaluate students’ bilingual competency and therefore their ability to provide quality care in a foreign language.

Background
In 2008 Loyola medical students began improving care for Spanish-speaking patients by creating the Peer-Led Medical Spanish Program that offers:
- Weekly language classes at multiple levels
- Training in cultural competency
- Interpreter shadowing experiences
- Placement with Spanish-speaking preceptors

Clinician Cultural/Linguistic Assessment
- Validated, standardized phone exam developed by ALTA Language Services and Kaiser Permanente.
- Simulates primary care encounters through guided interviews pertaining to medical and sociocultural situations.
- Subjectively assesses communicative competence, fluency, pronunciation, customer service, and cultural proficiency.
- Guided interviews objectively measure ability to:
  - Elicit and reproduce history details
  - Explain a differential diagnosis
  - Respond to patients’ questions
  - Give treatment instructions
  - Provide follow up directions

Objective Standardized Clinical Exam
- Developed and administered by Stritch School of Medicine.
- Based on patient cases and evaluation criteria currently used to evaluate medical students upon completing second year.
- Measured skills not observed in phone exams:
  - Face-to-face interpersonal skills
  - Cultural sensitivity in both history and physical exam
  - Completing an unprompted clinical encounter
  - Eliciting medical information and using it to make a clinical decision
  - Communicating information obtained in Spanish to English-speaking team members.

Certification Model
- Evaluate students’ Medical Spanish and cultural competency skills in the various capacities medical students serve.
- Provide students with objective and formative feedback to improve their bilingual skills.
- Help medical staff, patients, and outside programs recognize Certified Bilingual Spanish Medical Students via ID badge and transcript notations.

Program Outcomes
- Ten students took exams and earned certification.
- All students felt the certification was a valuable experience.
- All students reported the certification makes it easier for others to recognize their Medical Spanish.
- Of the three exams, students rated the Standardized Patient Exam highest in terms of:
  - Help understand bilingual skills
  - Provide recommendations to improve skills
  - Test skills used as a medical student
  - Provide accurate assessment of skills.

Student Feedback
- “I think that the certification is a great idea since it gave me more confidence in my Spanish-speaking capabilities, provided useful feedback in methods to improve my Spanish, and will allow me to convey to residencies that I can use Spanish in the clinical setting.”
- “I also think it is helpful to define what level of Spanish a student is so that other physicians can trust the interpreting job the student is doing for the safety of the patient.”
- “I really appreciated the feedback regarding more cultural approaches to Spanish-speaking patients. This is different than how we are taught regarding professionalism in our approach to English-speaking patients.”

Qualified Bilingual Staff
- Validated, standardized phone exam developed by ALTA Language Services and Kaiser Permanente.
- Objectively measures Medical Spanish knowledge and fluency.
- Subjectively evaluates pronunciation, grammar, conduit role, conveying the meaning, and fluidity in language transition.
- Tasks:
  - Social conversation
  - Customer service interpretation
  - Diagnosis and instructions interpretation
  - Sight translation
  - Bilingual medical vocabulary.