

August 28, 2017

Mr. Bryan Braegger  
Chief Executive Officer  
Yakima Regional Medical Center  
110 S 9th Ave.  
Yakima, WA 98902

Dear Mr. Braegger:

We write today to express serious concerns about Yakima Regional Medical Center's (YRMC) abdication of its legal responsibility to ensure that limited English proficient community members and patients have equal access to pertinent information regarding hospital services and financial assistance.

Columbia Legal Services, a non-profit public interest law firm, retained an independent entity, the Equal Rights Center, to conduct a comprehensive survey of the availability of financial assistance to Spanish-language speakers in hospitals throughout Washington State. ERC used paired civil rights testers to pose as prospective patients, both English- and Spanish-speaking, to measure differences in the information they received from a sample of twenty hospitals, including YRMC. The testing was conducted by phone and website research.

In YRMC's case, the testers reported that the operator/receptionist spoke English only and were unable to successfully transfer the caller to a bilingual staff member. Perhaps most troubling, testers were repeatedly disconnected without explanation when speaking Spanish.

This conduct violates both federal and state law, and prevents persons in greatest need from obtaining critical information regarding health care. This is even more concerning given your hospital's awareness of Charity Care requirements due to recent litigation.

As part of our work we also identified hospitals with a consistently low commitment to Charity Care. While the statewide average of Charity Care as a percentage of total patient service revenue was 2.94% in 2013, 1.48% in 2014, and 0.94% in 2015, YRMC reported Charity Care of 0.78% in 2013, 0.68% in 2014, and 0.24% in 2015 to the Department of Health. Percentages this far below the statewide average suggest substantial barriers to Charity Care persist at YRMC.



We urge you to immediately review your policies and practices and website, and take all steps to remedy these deficiencies without delay. Systemic denial of service to non-English proficient patients or due to hospital policy could constitute a deceptive act in violation of the Washington Consumer Protection Act.

Please respond within 30 days regarding this issue and describe steps that will be taken to ensure that non-English proficient patients will receive equal access to Charity Care and other services.

Very truly yours,



D. Ty Duhamel, Attorney  
Tony Gonzalez, Attorney