The Gullahs or Geechees, a distinctive group of African-American descendants of slaves, live in many of the one hundred Sea Islands, which stretch along the Atlantic Ocean coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. The name Gullah has come to be the accepted name of the islanders in South Carolina, while Geechee refers to those who reside in Georgia. (For purposes of this newsletter, we will use the name Gullah).

During the slave trade, Gullahs were valued for their ability to grow crucial crops such as rice. Today, much of the Gullah diet is centered around rice, seafood and natural seasonings. Due to their geographic location and strong sense of community, the Gullahs have been able to preserve much of their African cultural heritage. In 2006, Congress designated The Gullah/Geechee Corridor as a National Heritage Area.

**Cultural Traditions**

 Tradition is very important to the Gullah people. Many of their customs including storytelling, folklore, and songs, have been passed down through generations. While the size of the Gullah community is shrinking, families continue to be close knit and often celebrate holidays and other events together. Spirituality is important and many attend church services regularly. Their religious systems and beliefs include many African traditions that consist of communal prayer, song, and dance. Gullah people continue to hold traditional African beliefs including witchcraft, which they call “wudu” or “juju”. Also, this community has a strong tradition of using natural medicines. This was heavily influenced by their isolation, rural surroundings, and a general lack of medical practitioners in their communities. Some members of this community still prefer to use natural medicines as opposed to seeking Western medicine. Some may go untreated for long periods of time or may continue to use traditional remedies after a diagnosis has been made and medication prescribed. Providers who continue to encourage the use of western medicine may be seen as “meddlers”.

The Gullah people exhibit great environmental adaptability and continue to hold fast to their cultural traditions despite an ever changing economic environment.

**Language**

 The Gullah language is an English-based creole language with its own grammatical structures. (The word Gullah is also used to describe people who speak the language). The Gullah language relies on short, loosely connected sentences that do not contain many of the prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives, participles, and adverbs that tie sentences together in English. People who speak Gullah express different meanings by varying tones and pitches of the voice and by using non-verbal gestures. Gullah is not easily understood by outsiders. It is spoken more quickly and melodiously than English and includes many words that are unfamiliar to most people today. Listeners usually infer meaning of words based on their usage and context. The rules of grammar and the sound system are not the same as in the English language. Lack of understanding that Gullah is a specific language with its own vocabulary can cause confusion and misunderstandings during health care interactions can present challenges for nurses, providers and other care team members.

**WANT TO LEARN MORE?**

During the month of February, we will celebrate Black History Month at MUSC and will feature an educational program from a local community expert on the Gullah community. Questions regarding care delivery and health care decision-making may best be addressed during this presentation.

**Understanding Gullah Geechee Culture**

**Thursday, February 2, 2017**

12:30 pm - 1:30pm

2-West Amphitheater

Featured Speaker

Dr. J. Herman Blake, Executive Director, Gullah Geechee Corridor

Register via MyQuest
**Case Study : Language Assessments**

An infant’s mother requested an interpreter because she was confused about information that was delivered by a provider. When the MUSC Health interpreter entered the patient’s room, the patient’s mother mentioned that “another interpreter had already provided information from the doctor”. She further stated that she “did not understand his Spanish”. Through detailed questioning, the MUSC Health interpreter discovered that the ‘interpreter’ that the patient’s mother referenced was a medical student, who indicated that he knew enough Spanish to communicate to the patient on behalf of the attending physician.

**Solution**

The role of a medical interpreter is to communicate information accurately and completely, without adding, omitting, or substituting information. Interpreted messages should not be delivered to patients on behalf of providers (in their absence) but in the provider’s presence, whether in-person or telephonically. This practice aligns with the Standards of Practice for medical interpretation. Starting in early 2017, all bilingual and multilingual care team members, who communicate medical information to patients in languages other than English, will be required to have their language skills assessed. This will allow MUSC to have confidence in our ability to effectively communicate to patients with limited English proficiency and to meet national regulatory compliance standards.

The Interpretation Services Department is proud to announce that Lina Norena-Doll has passed the National Certification of Medical Interpreter Examination—CMI-Spanish.

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**Q&A CORNER**

Each issue of the newsletter will feature a Q&A section. The first person to respond with the correct answer to all questions will be recognized in a future edition.

1. What does the following words mean in Gullah language?
   - A. Brukaa’m _______
   - B. F’aid _______

2. What is the first step to reducing disparities in health care?
   - A- More intensive study of illnesses common to minorities
   - B- Building trust with patients
   - C- Telling patients that you treat everyone the same

Email answers to: interpreterservices@musc.edu

Subject: Cultural Spotlight - Q&A

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**MEET THE MEDICAL INTERPRETATION TEAM**

Introducing ……Rita (Paulina) Restle

Name one interesting thing about you? I love music. I love to sing, dance and listen to music. I grew up in a family that loved to sing and play music.

How many years have you been an interpreter at MUSC Health? I have worked at MUSC as an interpreter for over 5 years. I started my time here as a volunteer and worked my way up to become a full time medical interpreter.

What do you like most about interpreting? I love the opportunity to interact with people. I enjoy meeting people from various cultures and backgrounds. Also, I get the privilege to work with nurses, providers and other care team providers to build bridges with very diverse patients. These relationships make huge differences in peoples’ lives.

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**H ow to access Interpretation Services at MUSC**

- **Patients who speak Spanish**
  - In-person medical interpretation, 24/7/365
  - Use Service-Hub to request an interpreter. (MUHA Intranet)
  - Conference calls – extension 2-4595
  - Telephonic Interpretation—24/7/365

- **All Languages - Telephonic Interpretation Services**
  - Available 24/7/365, over 200 languages
  - Call 1-855-305-0998
  - Request language, including any dialects. Can schedule a time for a phone interpreter for uncommon dialects.

- **Patients who are deaf or hard of hearing**
  - In-house Medical Interpretation is Available Mondays through Fridays, 8:00 am—5:00pm
  - In-Person Interpretation (After-Hours/Weekends)–Contact Charleston Interpreting Services at 678-446-7780
  - Video Remote Interpretation- (ASL), Available 24/7/365 – Equipment is stored in Security Offices at ART and Main Hospital

ALWAYS DOCUMENT THAT INTERPRETATION SERVICES WAS USED.. IF IT ISN'T DOCUMENTED, IT WASN'T DONE!!!