Pearson

Languages and Service



Katherine Lopez

Antenatal and Newborn Screening Specialist Midwife

Katherine Lopez is an Antenatal and Newborn Screening Specialist Midwife, supporting women and families through some of the most important and sensitive moments of their lives.

Every day, she helps expectant parents understand complex medical information so they can make informed decisions about their pregnancies.

"When I was at school, I studied French and Spanish at GCSE before continuing with A level French. While I enjoyed languages, my focus after sixth form was on beginning my midwifery degree. I had no time to continue my language learning, nor did I see the point in doing so.

Looking back, how could I have been so wrong?!

It wasn't until I stepped on to the ward that I realised just how valuable languages are.

I work in a hospital serving a community in which many patients speak little or no English. And, from the start of my career, I swiftly recognised that being able to **communicate directly** with patients in their own language **would make a real difference.**



"I never realised how important languages would be, until I became a midwife."

Languages as a lifeline

We are fortunate to have access to professional telephone interpreters that are available 24 hours a day, however, they are not medically trained, which can sometimes make it difficult to ensure complex information is translated accurately and fully understood.



Many of the conversations I have are very sensitive and require women to have a clear understanding of the information I'm trying to give them, so they can make important choices. If I have the ability to communicate in other languages, this process would often be easier for all involved.

Think about someone in labour, one of the most challenging moments for a woman. Communication is already difficult because of pain, fear and distress. Not all women will want a telephone interpreter in the room with them, and while friends and family are often great at supporting the medical teams when needed, **I know what a difference it would make to myself and my role if I spoke their language.**

The biggest benefit of speaking another language in healthcare is simple:

patient safety.

Knowing another language would empower me to support my patients in the moment, without the need to wait for the interpreter. Instead, I lean on my medically trained colleagues to translate for me to ensure the correct medical terminology is used and can be explained in detail.

But it's not just on the maternity ward where languages are extremely beneficial. Any part of the hospital where patients, family and friends can be found, languages play an important part. And that's not just us medical professionals; think...



Reception staff



Administrators



Porters



And more!



Advocating for languages

I couldn't be more of an advocate for language learning now. The French I once knew was helpful when I travelled, and my little knowledge of Spanish still helps me communicate with my husband's family in Spain.

But you never know when you'll be in a situation where knowing another language will be useful. The younger you are when you start learning, the quicker and easier it is to pick up. If you keep practising, it becomes a lifelong skill. So yes, it can be hard, but I wish I had realised how worthwhile languages would be when I was at school.

I'm experiencing it first hand with my son and his friends - and it's understandable that not everyone will get excited about languages at the age of 14. But if students could see how languages could impact them in real life, they would realise the many doors languages could open, both personally and professionally.

Learning a language is a skill you'll never regret having. Even if you think you know what you want to do now, plans change, and life can take you in all kinds of directions.

Being able to speak, listen and understand another language is invaluable. I see it make a difference to people's lives each and every day.