

Case Study:

Language Support and Nurse-Escorted Repatriation Following a COPD Exacerbation in Barcelona

Service line: Medical Case Management, Language Advocacy & Nurse-Escorted Repatriation
Region: Barcelona, Spain → Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Patient profile: 65-year-old female, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Overview

A 65-year-old woman was admitted to a private hospital in Barcelona with an exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Neither she nor her family spoke Spanish, which made it difficult for them to communicate their concerns to the treating team or fully understand the medical information being given to them. Our medical assistance team supported the family throughout the admission with Spanish-language advocacy, before arranging a nurse-escorted repatriation home to Edinburgh once she was fit to travel.

The Challenge

This case combined a genuine clinical need with a significant communication barrier at a stressful time for the patient and her family:

Active respiratory condition:

A COPD exacerbation is a genuine, potentially serious respiratory event, requiring proper hospital treatment and careful assessment before any travel could be considered.

Language barrier:

With neither the patient nor her family speaking Spanish, there was a real risk of miscommunication — both in understanding the clinical picture being explained to them, and in ensuring the patient's own concerns and history were properly communicated to the treating team.

Patient and family reassurance:

Beyond the practical translation need, the family needed a trusted advocate who could help them feel properly informed and involved in decisions about her care, at a time when they may otherwise have felt shut out of the process.

Oxygen-dependent air travel:

Given her underlying COPD, any return flight needed to be planned around her ongoing oxygen requirements, rather than assuming she could travel as a standard passenger.

Safe, comfortable journey home:

The repatriation needed to move her from hospital care in Barcelona to home in Edinburgh smoothly, without compromising her respiratory stability along the way.

Why It Mattered

A serious respiratory admission is stressful enough without also having to navigate it in an unfamiliar language, far from home. This case demonstrates the value of genuine language advocacy alongside clinical case management: ensuring a patient and her family are properly informed and heard throughout an admission abroad, and then translating that same level of care into a safe, appropriately supported journey home — with the right clinical escort and equipment for her specific condition.

Outcome

The patient and her family were properly supported and informed throughout a hospital admission that could otherwise have been made significantly more stressful and confusing by the language barrier, and she was safely returned home to Edinburgh by nurse-escorted commercial flight with appropriate oxygen support.

Our Response

1. Spanish-Language Support Throughout Admission

Our medical assistance team provided fluent and working medical Spanish support throughout the patient's hospital admission, bridging the communication gap between the patient, her family, and the Spanish treating team.

2. Translation of Medical Reports

Medical reports and clinical information were translated for the patient and her family, ensuring they had a clear, accurate understanding of her diagnosis, treatment, and progress at every stage of the admission.

3. Advocacy on the Patient's Behalf

Beyond translation, our team actively advocated on the patient's behalf with the Spanish hospital, ensuring her concerns and those of her family were properly heard and addressed by the treating team, and that she and her family were genuinely included in decisions about her care.

4. Fitness-to-Fly Assessment and Repatriation Planning

Once her condition had stabilised, our team assessed her fitness to travel and planned a repatriation appropriate to her ongoing respiratory needs, including arranging for supplemental oxygen to be available throughout the journey.

5. Nurse-Escorted Commercial Repatriation

The patient was repatriated from Barcelona to Edinburgh on a commercial flight, accompanied by a nurse escort and supported by supplemental oxygen throughout the journey, ensuring her respiratory condition was properly monitored and managed from departure to arrival.

Key outcomes:

- Clear, accurate Spanish-language communication maintained throughout the hospital admission
- Medical reports translated, giving the patient and her family genuine understanding of her diagnosis and treatment
- Active advocacy ensured the patient's and family's concerns were properly addressed by the Spanish treating team
- Repatriation planned around her ongoing oxygen needs rather than treated as routine travel
- Safe, comfortable nurse-escorted commercial flight home to Edinburgh with supplemental oxygen throughout

This case study has been anonymised to protect patient confidentiality. Details reflect the general nature of the case and the services provided.