

## Life & Times Transcript

07/20/05

Sam Louie>> While the need for medical interpreters is obvious, researchers here at USC are taking medical translation to a new level. They're developing technology to help doctors communicate with patients directly in a foreign language.

[Film Clip]

Sam Louie>> Scientists at USC's Viterbi School of Engineering are building a voice to voice translation machine. The computer program allows for a rudimentary conversation between an English speaking doctor and a Persian patient.

Shrikanth Narayanan>> When you go to any hospital in Los Angeles County, for example, the number of people who don't speak English, it's just enormous. And if technology devices can even help there, it makes a huge impact.

Sam Louie>> USC Associate Professor Shrikanth Narayanan leads the group developing the program. He says this is just a prototype, but it offers an exciting glimpse of what lies ahead.

Shrikanth Narayanan>> Speech translation is like a holy grail kind of project for us. Imagine having people talk to one another without knowing each other's language and the machine is trying to fill in the gap or holes between them.

Sam Louie>> Narayanan concedes there is still a lot of work to be done and it will be several more years before these models are in a doctor's office. In the meantime, PALS has only one hundred interpreters and the need is enormous. They say it would help if a certification program was created to professionalize the service, but until then, many patients and doctors will have to struggle and hope the lack of communication doesn't lead to dire consequences. I'm Sam Louie for Life and Times.