

MULTILINGUAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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Medical professionals working in bilingual countries often deal with healthy bilingual and multilingual patients who seek advice about language-related matters, for instance the use of multiple languages in the home or the optimal age for a child to start learning a second language. Some of these patients are immigrants to the host countries, other are citizens who speak the countries' official languages in the home. The frequent contact with bilingual and multilingual individuals raises the question of the extent to which research findings about bi-/multilingualism, language acquisition and language development in children and adults are reflected in current practices in the medical profession, and whether individually held beliefs are likely to influence the type of advice families receive. Doctors and nurses working with families in the Republic of Ireland, a bilingual country with a high flow of recent immigration, were interviewed to begin to examine these questions more closely. The discussion reports on major findings and suggests possible area of intervention.