AKRON—Since 2012, residents from Akron Children's Hospital have been visiting ASIA to connect with members of Akron's Southeast Asian refugee community. These visits became part of Akron Children's residency program in response to the rising volume of immigrant and refugee patients at the hospital, particularly at the emergency room and Locust Pediatrics Care Group. The residents participate in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes taught at ASIA by Dr. Mary Dee. This experience allows residents to better understand and serve limited English-proficient (LEP) patients. Meanwhile, the students gain insight into how to best communicate with health providers.

The partnership began when Akron Children’s staff contacted Sandy Lin, manager of ASIA’s Interpretation and Translation Services. “They were familiar with me because I help provide medical interpreters [to Akron Children’s],” said Mrs. Lin. “When they were looking to send their residents somewhere, of course I thought of Mary’s class.”

When they arrive at ASIA’s Akron office, residents are briefed on ASIA’s programs and services before joining the ESOL class. The majority of ASIA’s ESOL students are refugees from the Mon and Karen ethnic minorities of Myanmar (formerly Burma) and the Hmong ethnic minority of Laos. While the residents may simply observe, Dr. Dee always invites them to present impromptu on certain health topics or conduct mock office visits with the students. “These activities give the students an opportunity to apply their communication and listening skills. They help make visits to a doctor’s office less intimidating,” said Dr. Dee, adding, “And it gives the residents a chance to interact with the students and to be aware of the challenges they face. Overall, it is a win-win partnership.”

During her Monday, January 14, visit to ASIA’s ESOL class, Dr. Katherine Prowse raised students’ awareness of the severe flu season by presenting on flu prevention, tips in the treatment of young children, and the differences between cold and flu symptoms. Dr. Todd Jacobs and Dr. Dan Smith made a similar presentation on Monday, January 28. Dr. Jacobs and Dr. Smith also taught the students how to characterize pain to health providers and identify abnormal symptoms in their children.

The interaction between the residents and the students is important to improving communication skills on both sides. Immigrant and refugee community members build confidence using English to ask questions of
and describe health issues to their doctors. For their part, physicians better grasp the need to check especially carefully for patient comprehension. “Being here reminded me that I need to get a feel for what [an LEP patient] understands before I start talking,” said Dr. Jacobs, adding, “It’s good to see this ESOL class raising awareness of the health system, and good to know that we can refer patients to this resource [ASIA].”

Dr. Smith stressed the importance of empowering patients to ask questions, saying that many immigrant and refugee patients do not speak up when they do not understand their doctor. “Encouraging them to ask questions is the one thing I would emphasize the most.”

ESOL classes at ASIA are made possible by Project Learn of Summit County (www.projectlearnsummit.org).

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Asian Services In Action
Founded in 1995, Asian Services In Action’s mission is to empower and advocate for Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (AAPIs); and to provide AAPIs access to quality, culturally, and linguistically appropriate information and services. Visit www.asiaohio.org to learn more. Follow ASIA on Facebook and Twitter!

Akron Children’s Hospital
Akron Children’s is the largest pediatric provider in northeast Ohio. With two pediatric hospitals, and 20 primary care and 67 pediatric specialty locations, they handle more than 600,000 patient visits a year. Akron Children’s is committed to providing quality, family-centered care, and improving the treatment of childhood illness and injury through research. Visit www.akronchildrens.org to learn more.