

TIPS FOR USING INTERPRETERS

- Know what your legal responsibilities are for providing interpreters. More information can be found at www.lep.gov.
- **Never use children to interpret and only use relatives or friends when no other interpreter can be found or the client insists on using his/her own interpreter.** It is still the responsibility of the agency to provide an interpreter, and clients should be made aware that one will be provided at no cost to them.
- **It is always best to use an interpreter who has some training in interpreting skills. Remember, it is not enough to be just bilingual.**
- It is best to evaluate the language proficiency of an interpreter through a reputable independent source. Excessive hesitation, pausing and repeated clarifications may be a cause for concern regarding the interpreter's fluency or proficiency.
- Share your Interpreter Code of Ethics (especially as it relates to confidentiality) with all interpreters and ask them to sign, if it is your policy.
- Make sure to document in the client record or file the interpreter's name and contact information.
- Brief the interpreter before the interview; give her/him relevant information about the session.
- **Do not assume that an interpreter will be able to translate (provide explanations of written material or provide a written message (e.g., release of information, permission to treat, birth certificate, transcripts, etc)).**
- Allow extra time for the session as interpreting may require two to three times the amount of time a non-interpreted session requires.
- When possible, choose an interpreter whose age, sex, and background make it easier to work with the client, etc.
- Try to make sure the interpreter has some understanding of the importance of the session.
- Ask the interpreter to share cultural beliefs and practices that may be relevant to the interpreted situation.
- **Address the patient directly; avoid directing your comments to the interpreter.**
- **Don't talk too long without letting the interpreter speak.** Be aware that some interpreters may use pen and paper to take notes in order to better interpret. Ask for the notes at the end of the session to shred.
- **Avoid using idioms, jargon, or technical language that may be difficult to interpret or understand.**
- Let the interpreter know he/she can request clarification from you or the client when needed.
- **It is a provider's responsibility to restate or clarify information if the client doesn't understand.**
- Evaluate the interpreter's style and approach toward clients. For special situations and problem cases, try to match the interpreter to the task.
- Be patient. Careful interpretation often requires the interpreter to use long phrases.
- **Remember that non-verbal language varies from culture to culture and do not make assumptions based on your own cultural norms (e.g., eye contact, handshakes).**
- **If it's culturally appropriate, the client may speak to the interpreter directly. Keep in mind that the provider is directing the conversation and communication should be focused between the provider and client.**
- Pursue seemingly unconnected issues that the client raises. These issues may lead to crucial information or uncovered difficulties with the interpretation.
- Come back to an issue if you suspect a problem; be certain the interpreter knows what you want, use related questions, changing the wording, and come at it indirectly.

TIPS FOR INTERPRETERS

- Interpreters should introduce themselves and their role, stating that they will interpret everything that is said without omission and without additional information.
- Interpreters should reinforce to clients that all information will remain confidential.*
- Interpreters should refrain from adding meaning or their own ideas, answering for the client, or omitting information.
- To the extent possible and culturally appropriate, the interpreter should position him/herself behind or to the side of the client so that client and provider are looking at one another.
- The interpreter may choose to bow his/her head while interpreting to encourage the client and provider to speak to one another.
- The interpreter should check for understanding throughout the session.
- The interpreter should request clarification from the provider or the client when there is a lack of understanding based on culture, background, educational level, etc.
- The interpreter must let the client take responsibility for clarifying or explaining when the provider does not understand.

*The interpreter is responsible for requesting the confidentiality policy for the agency for which he/she is interpreting. Some entities are required by law to report (mandated reporters) in case of child or elder abuse. The interpreter should inform the client of the agency policy at the beginning of the session.

INTERPRETER CODE OF ETHICS

- **Confidentiality** – Interpreters must treat all information learned during the interpretation as confidential. Information shall only be shared on a “need to know” basis with other employees and service providers to the extent permitted by law.* Interpreters shall not use confidential information acquired in the course of official duties, or request or gain access to confidential information maintained by providers, in order to further his or her own personal interest or the interests of a friend, relative, or business associate.
- **Accuracy: Conveying the Content and Spirit of What is Said** – Interpreters must transmit the message in a thorough and faithful manner, giving consideration to linguistic variations in both languages and conveying the tone and spirit of the original message. A word-for-word interpretation may not convey the intended idea. The interpreter must determine the relevant concept and say it in language that is readily understandable and culturally appropriate to the listener. In addition, the interpreter will make every effort to assure that the client has understood questions, instructions, and other information transmitted by the service provider.
- **Completeness: Conveying Everything That Is Said** – Interpreters must interpret everything that is said by all people in the interaction without omitting, adding, condensing, or changing anything. If the content to be interpreted might be perceived as offense, insensitive, or otherwise harmful to the dignity and well being of the client, the interpreter should advise the providers of this before interpreting.
- **Conveying Cultural Frameworks** – Interpreters shall explain cultural differences of practice to the providers and clients when appropriate.
- **Non-Judgmental Attitude about the Content to be Interpreted** – An interpreter’s function is to facilitate communication. Interpreters are not responsible for what is said by anyone for whom they are interpreting. Even if the interpreter disagrees with what is said, thinks it is wrong, a lie, or even immoral, the interpreter must suspend judgment, make no comment, and interpret everything accurately.

- **Client Self-Determination** – The client might ask the interpreter for his or her opinion. When this happens, the interpreter may provide or restate information that will assist the client in making his or her own decision. The interpreter will not influence the opinion of clients by telling them what action to take.
- **Attitude Toward Clients** - The interpreter should strive to develop a relationship of trust and respect at all times with the client by adopting a caring, attentive, yet discreet and impartial attitude toward the client, toward his or her question, concerns and needs. The interpreter shall treat each client equally with dignity and respect regardless of race, color, gender, religion, nationality, political persuasion, or life-style choice.
- **Acceptance of Assignments** – If competency level or personal sentiments make it difficult to abide by any of the above conditions, the interpreter shall decline or withdraw from the assignment. Interpreters should disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest that could affect their objectivity. For example, interpreters should refrain from providing services to family members or to close personal friends except in emergencies. In personal relationships, it is difficult to remain unbiased or non-judgmental.

In emergency situations, interpreters may be asked to do interpretations for which they are not qualified. The interpreter may consent only as long as all parties understand the limitations and another interpreter is not available.

- **Compensation** – The fee for interpretation should be agreed upon by the provider and interpreter and should not be charged to the client.
- **Self-Evaluation** – Interpreters should represent their certifications, training, and experience accurately and completely.
- **Ethical Violations** – Interpreters shall withdraw immediately from encounters that they perceive to be in violation of the Code of Ethics.
- **Professionalism** – Interpreters shall be punctual, prepared, and dressed in an appropriate manner. The trained interpreter is a professional who maintains professional behavior at all time while assisting clients and who seeks to further his or her knowledge and skills through continuing studies and training.

By signing this document, I am verifying that I have read, understand, and agree to all the provisions listed in the above Code of Ethics.

Name and Title (Printed)

Signature Date

Agency

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone

[Adapted from: The Cross Cultural Health Care Program (CCHCP) Medical Interpreter Code of Ethics. Source: This code is a compilation of the Codes of Ethics from the Hospital Interpretation Program in Seattle, WA; Boston City Hospital in Boston, MA; and the American Medical Interpreters and Translators Association (AMISTAS) in Stanford, CA.]