

TEN TIPS FOR WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER

1. Being bilingual is not enough to ensure the quality of an interpreter.

Interpreting is a skill - speaking two languages FLUENTLY will increase the likelihood that professional, medical interpreting is taking place.

2. Don't ask medical interpreters to provide word-for-word interpreting.

Interpreters relay the meaning of the words. A word-for-word interpretation will often lose meaning.

3. Expect medical interpreters to abide by a Code of Ethics.

A trained/certified medical interpreter will adhere to confidentiality, accuracy and impartiality.

4. Don't ask interpreters to be healthcare providers.

Interpreters act only as the bridge to communication. They interpret any message you wish to relay, but they are not the messenger.

5. Clarify abbreviations and minimize medical jargon.

Medical acronyms, etc., will make no sense to limited-English speakers since medical English is a language unto itself.

6. Do not ask interpreters NOT to interpret something.

The interpreter's Code of Ethics indicates that an interpreter should interpret everything that is said, as it is said. If you do not want something repeated, do not say it in front of an interpreter.

7. Address the patient, not the interpreter, and maintain primary eye contact with your patient.

The role of the interpreter is essential, but it is secondary to your relationship with the patient.

8. Speak at a comfortable pace and pause frequently to allow for interpretation.

In order to render a complete interpretation, speak one or two sentences at a time. The interpreter will let you know if you are speaking too fast or are saying too much at once.

9. Do not ask the patient to bring their own interpreter and do not ask another patient, child, friend or family member to interpret for you.

Legal obligations make it imperative that qualified language services are utilized in each clinical encounter where the patient or the patient's family members and the patient's provider(s) are unable to communicate at the same level as two English speakers are able to communicate.

10. Document the use of an interpreter.

Circumstances may make it impossible to utilize qualified language services in a timely manner. The medical record should reflect when an interpreter is used, the name of the interpreter and any obstacles using an interpreter. Know how to locate an interpreter, either over the phone or in person.

A trained interpreter facilitates communication between two people who do not speak the same language.

A trained interpreter learns skills and techniques in order to act as a bridge when a language barrier exists.

Moreover, trained interpreters follow a professional code of ethics and standards of practice while interacting with providers and consumers.