

Working with Interpreters in Health Care Settings

Who can you use as an interpreter?

- Trained bilingual staff
- On-staff interpreters
- Contract interpreters
- Telephone interpreters
- Trained volunteers

Who should not serve as a health interpreter?

- Patients' family and friends
- Children under 18 years old
- Other patients and visitors
- Untrained volunteers

What can trained interpreters do for me?

- Reduce liability, help ensure appropriate utilization, increase client compliance and satisfaction with services
- Provide a quality service
- Assure effective communication between the client and provider
- Support effective use of time during the clinical encounter
- Improve outcomes

Cultural aspects of working with people from different cultures

- Remember lifelong experience
- Avoid stereotyping
- Try to assign same-sex health care providers/interpreters
- Be familiar with folk illnesses
- Work with family and community leaders
- Consider the priorities for the patient
- Learn about the beliefs and practices of the patient populations you serve

Tips for providers working with interpreters:

- Introduce all participants
- Position interpreter behind the patient or slightly off to the side; always focus on the patient
- Speak directly to the client and use first person
- Speak at a moderate pace and at normal volume
- Pause often
- Avoid using technical vocabulary
- Allow the interpreter time to interpret; do not expect them to interpret while you are speaking
- Ask the interpreter to interpret everything that is said exactly: add nothing, omit nothing and change nothing
- Document the use of an interpreter by name, in the client chart