

# migrant-friendly hospitals

## What is a medical interpreter: Core skills and core knowledge

### Task

- Facilitate the exchange of clinical information across language barriers

### Core skills

- Proficiency in [the local language] and the languages to be used for interpreting
- Capability to interpret from and into each language pair that is being interpreted
- Ability to interpret a message uttered in a source language into an equivalent message in the target language so that the recipient responds to it as if s/he has heard it in the original language (accuracy and completeness as key measures)
- Capacity to manage the flow of communication between the patient and the provider, including attention to interpersonal dynamics between patient and provider, as well as managing the triadic relationship so that the patient and provider relate primarily to each other.
- Ability to serve as a cultural broker, if necessary, between patient and provider, including sensing if and when culturally based beliefs are affecting the perception and presentation of the illness, as well as being able to articulate these cultural differences or practices to providers and patients
- Ability to switch from indirect interpreting mode (s/he says that....) to direct interpreting mode (I.....) and from consecutive mode to simultaneous mode, following the patient's flow of speech, where appropriate (e.g. in psychiatric encounters when patients are in an agitated state)

### Core knowledge

- Comprehension of medical terminology and concepts in the local language and in all languages to be used for interpreting. Depending on the clinical circumstance, additional specialised knowledge may be required on the concepts, terminology and psychosocial issues around a specific area (e.g. rape counselling, child abuse assessment, psychiatric encounters and bereavement interventions).
- Familiarity with common, relevant socio-cultural assumptions and circumstances that may impact the provider-patient interaction, including knowledge of specific cultural concepts as well as an understanding of biomedical culture
- Understanding “untranslatable” words, which represent source language concepts for which a comparable referent does not exist in the society of the target language.

Adapted from: Torres, B. Best Practice Recommendations for Hospital-Based Interpreter Services, prepared for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Office for Minority Health: <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/bhqm/2bestpra.pdf>, pp. 24-25