



## 10 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH INTERPRETERS

- 1. Choose an interpreter who meets the needs of the patient, considering age, sex and background.**

A patient might be reluctant to disclose personal and sensitive information, for example, in front of an interpreter of a different sex.
- 2. Hold a brief introductory discussion with the interpreter.**

If it is your first time working with a professional interpreter, briefly meet with the interpreter first to agree on basic interpretation protocols. Let the interpreter brief the patient on the interpreter's role.
- 3. Allow enough time for the interpreted sessions.**

Remember that an interpreted conversation requires more time. What can be said in a few words in one language may require a lengthy paraphrase in another.
- 4. Speak in a normal voice, clearly, and not too fast or too loudly.**

It is usually easier for the interpreter to understand speech produced at normal speed and with normal rhythms, than artificially slow speech.
- 5. Avoid acronyms, jargon, and technical terms.**

Avoid idioms, technical words, or cultural references that might be difficult to translate. Some concepts may be easy for the interpreter to understand but extremely difficult to translate (i.e. positive test results).
- 6. Face the patient and talk to the patient directly. Be brief, explicit and basic.**

Remember that you are communicating with the patient through an interpreter. Pause after a full thought for the interpretation to be accurate and complete. If you speak too long, the interpreter may not remember and miss what was said.
- 7. Don't ask or say anything that you don't want the patient to hear.**

Expect everything you say to be interpreted, and everything the patient and their family says.
- 8. Be patient and avoid interrupting during interpretation.**

Allow the interpreter as much time as necessary to ask questions, for repeats, and for clarification. Be prepared to repeat yourself in different words if your message is not understood. Professional interpreters do not translate word-for-word but rather concept-by-concept. Also remember that English is a direct language, and may need to be relayed into complex grammar and a different communication pattern.
- 9. Be sensitive to appropriate communication standards.**

Different cultures have different protocols to discuss sensitive topics and to address physicians. Many ideas taken for granted in America do not exist in the patient's culture and may need detailed explanation in another language. Take advantage of your interpreter's insight and let the interpreter be your "Cultural Broker."
- 10. Read body language in the cultural context.**

Watch the patient's eyes, facial expression, or body language when you speak and when the interpreter speaks. Look for signs of comprehension, confusion, agreement, or disagreement.

*Note: When working with interpreters, reassure the patient that the information will be kept confidential.*