



ESSAY #1

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Darien Mejia

Now at days becoming a certified interpreter is just the first step of professionalization. The true challenge is staying current to the ever changing treatments and discoveries that day to day the world of medicine faces. When we as interpreters take the time to prepare for our assignments, we are a step ahead of the game and we will be more confident of the words we will use as the session unfolds and we will increase the quality of our services.

Education may take many forms: it is as basic as preparing for our assignments when we know ahead of time a little bit of what we are going to encounter. For example, if we know we will interpret for a Bone Marrow Transplant case, it will be very helpful to know some basic information about immunology, graft versus host disease and chemotherapy drugs side effects. Even though, we cannot be experts in everything it helps when we understand what are we talking about so that we can be better communicators.

We may also be in situations when it is wiser to be humble and say “interpreter needs clarification” and ask the provider to explain the world we may not know, or to write it for us. We may be able to repeat it in the target language but still go to a good educational tool online to dig a bit more and learn the challenging world or concept in more depth in order to be able to learn it and use it better next time.

It is also very useful to continue our education and attend workshops, conferences, and maybe going back to school to increase our medical vocabulary, anatomy, physiology or learn some Greek and Latin to be able to understand words roots of difficult words while interpreting. Something as simple as knowing that from Greek “ortho” means straight and “Optikas” means vision can help us grasp the meaning of the word “orthoptics” which is the study or treatment of disorders of vision specific to the eye movements or eye alignment.

What I love about being an interpreter is the fact that every day is an opportunity to learn and to grow. The more we educate ourselves the more we can help others one session at a time. It is a dynamic profession that demands the ability to detect when clarification is needed if the cultural or educational barriers of the person we are interpreting for are calling for a lower register, as well as the ability to identify when there is a word or term we could have used better, or we could write the difficult words or diagnosis for the patients to have an use in the future. In many instances there are words or acronyms that are used and the patients don’t ask the meaning, but it is important to break cultural/educational barriers and empower the patients with the knowledge that will help them receive better medical care. That is ultimately the goal of our profession.

ESSAY #2

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

by Ellen C. Kaufman, M.S., CSC

I once read that knowing two languages doesn't make you an interpreter just as having two hands doesn't make you a concert pianist. I like this saying because it helps people unfamiliar with what interpreting actually entails understand that there may just be more to it than knowing two languages. Professional interpreters bring a "large bag" of knowledge and skills to each assignment. We are linguistic and cultural mediators and also have the communication skills to educate people about what we do in a way that each person, professional and patient/family member alike will understand. This awareness of the processes we utilize in our work and the vocabulary and ability to explain them set us apart as professionals.

The expectation that we must function ethically, following a Code of Ethics or Code of Professional Conduct raises our work to an even higher level of professionalism. Education takes a bilingual person and teaches him/her that one's own feelings and desire to give advice need to be removed from the process. We have the responsibility to communicate the two parties' thoughts, emotions and intent without interference from our own beliefs and feelings. A great deal of training is required to learn how the professional medical interpreter must function in different situations. A lot of analysis and even role playing takes place as novice interpreters work through how a Code of Ethics should and does effect professional behavior, and the consequences of our behavior on our clients, patients and on our profession.

Professional education makes it possible to choose a word appropriate in context and register from a group of words similar but not identical in meaning and intent. People without training may have a more limited vocabulary, be unfamiliar with synonyms or the subtle differences between words. Word choice is crucial to both parties being accurately and fairly understood. A bilingual person untrained in professional interpretation may color the exchange inadvertently or incorrectly transmit a piece of critical information with dire results.

Professional medical interpreters have working knowledge of specialized medical vocabulary and procedures in two languages further distinguishing us from interpreters in other fields. This knowledge is acquired through formal training. We take courses in medical terminology, anatomy and physiology and we learn about medical and surgical procedures. This includes not only pertinent vocabulary, but also concerns about our placement and safety in these settings. Professional medical interpreters also have knowledge of and adhere to privacy practices such as HIPAA.

Medical interpreters are a very important part of the healthcare system, ensuring that all language speakers have the right to understand and be understood. Medical interpreter training is crucial so that medical providers, institutions and patients have access to the most skilled and professional interpreters in numbers adequate to fill this need.

ESSAY #3

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Helena Paneyko

The title of this essay entails the dissection of each of its parts, so we can better understand the conclusions

What is an interpreter? A interpreter is not only a person who is bilingual, but one who can convert the meaning of what it has said in a source language into a target language, with accuracy and as close as transmitting the intentions of the speaker wants to convey. To be able to do that, an interpreter needs to listen and understand what it has been said, and turn it into the other language as faithfully as possible.

What is a medical interpreter? A medical interpreter is not only a skilled interpreter accordingly to the above explanation, but one who, in addition, is able to understand the medical lingo spoken by medical professionals and to communicate it to a patient and/or his/her authorized relatives (and vice versa), reflecting the same register as the one that has been spoken. This also implies a high level of responsibility where even the life of a human being could be at risk.

Why education for medical interpreters? Education is basic for anything implying more than just an instinct and is what makes a big difference between a trade, and a profession which requires integrity, knowledge, art and common sense. In addition to the understanding of the importance of our role as interpreters which is to be the link between two (or more) people that are not able to communicate, it is important to follow the rules and regulations of the field, to comply with the professional ethics and the currently advances in both, the medical field and the interpreter's field.

What is professionalization? We, as interpreters, deal with professionals who require a high level of performance from us. We also deal with people of different cultures, religions and believe. Accordingly to a definition of professionalism, it is a social process that involves acceptable qualifications as well as to have a professional body who can oversee the conduct of the members of the profession.

Do we need to evolve, as medical interpreters, to the point of professionalism? The answer is definitively yes. We are professionals, dealing with professionals with the responsibilities, rights and duties of professionals.

Professionals, then, come hand in hand with education. We need to educate and to better ourselves. We need to keep updating our knowledge so we can be respected and valued. We need to have higher standards in order to provide a more qualified service. We need to believe that our contribution goes further than the simple fact of conveying words into another language.

Our mission is praiseworthy, and the moment is now.

ESSAY #4

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Kelly Garvin Rodriguez

Interpreting is not new. Ad hoc interpreters have been around since before the polyglot Sacagawea helped Lewis and Clark communicate with the Native Americans during their epic journey. *Professional* interpreting, however, is a relatively young field, but has grown steadily since its inception. Two factors drive this growth: patient need and legislation. As our profession grows in visibility and in numbers, so should our training. Doctors and facilities are compelled to employ our services, and should know they are getting their money. Further, the patient-provider relationship is a sacred space, and a good interpreter knows this instinctively. Our demeanor, word choice, and delivery all impact patient care. Preparation is paramount.

In the last twenty years, there has been necessary improvement in training opportunities for healthcare interpreters. Yesterday's interpreters had little formal training. Many were simply bilingual and helpful; some were children. Now, training programs range from one day seminars, to boot camps, to 40-hour intensives, even graduate level degree programs. The CMI exam is a watershed accomplishment; as an objective measure of competence, the CMI credential garners respect for its bearers. We, like other professions, adhere to a Code of Ethics and conduct ourselves with the decorum appropriate the position. All of these things bolster our credibility and the positive regard we want to inspire in our peers. And there is more we can do.

As any professional, we strive to become experts in our field. Curiosity, coupled with enthusiasm for learning, is a hallmark of an engaged practitioner dedicated to optimal performance. Further education benefits *the individual* tremendously; his confidence grows along with his knowledge. Education benefits *the profession* as well, because our colleagues understand that we come equipped with a rigorous academic background.

Opportunities abound for the inquisitive interpreter. The afore-mentioned boot-camps and intensives are essential for basic skills such as note-taking, memory exercises, and introductory material about body systems and medical terminology. After achieving CMI, though, more in-depth learning is in order. An interpreter can turn to community colleges for undergraduate Anatomy and Physiology courses. Some are available on-line, making learning convenient. Medical seminars are another source of up-to-date information. These are found at teaching hospitals and medical schools. Many diseases have organizations that sponsor educational events for patients and families, and are helpful for interpreters. Reading scientific journals, like *Lancet*, *JAMA*, *Nature*, or other peer-review publications, is an excellent way to stay current on trends in medicine. Websites are quick resources for information; try NIH and NCI. Some interpreters might find a particular disease so interesting that they concentrate on it, learning about current diagnostic methods, treatments and research efforts, becoming quasi-specialists in that arena.

Ambitious educational standards prepare our people, enhance our respectability, and are consistent with the skilled experts that we aim to be. A commitment to professional development ensures that we begin our careers competent, and continue to serve our patients and our doctors well, as medical professionals prepared and eager to take our rightful place on the healthcare team.

ESSAY #5

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Kelly Martinkus:

Healthcare is a field in which training and education, including continuing education, is imperative in order to provide the highest quality of care for patients. In today's world, many allied health professions have used education and training as a means of professionalization, and medical interpreting is no exception.

Thanks to formal education, nursing in the 21st Century is far different from nursing during the time of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. Training and education for nurses in the U.S. has evolved greatly throughout the years, leading to the professionalization of the field. Initially, training was provided by nurses with experience. Later, hospitals offered training programs for nurses that mainly involved bedside nursing. Today, most nursing programs in the U.S. are college and university programs that offer extensive academic coursework as well as hands on training. Many modern nurses hold master's degrees, doctoral degrees, or various certifications within their field, and autonomy in nursing is more prevalent than ever.

It is through education that we will see the evolution and professionalization of medical interpreting as we have seen in the field of nursing. In the words of Daniel J. Boorstin, "Education is learning what you didn't even know you didn't know." Often times when we take that next step in our academic or professional careers, we don't realize the knowledge or training we actually lack until someone with greater knowledge enlightens us. Physicians, for example, go through a series of humbling and enlightening experiences throughout the various phases of their education and training. A young physician may be proud of himself for attaining his degree or passing his next professional exam only to be humbled by his attending physicians who have far greater knowledge and experience than he. When that young physician finally achieves the highest level of accomplishment in his particular medical specialty, he will still be required to remain abreast of changes in the field and complete continuing education. It is education and training that has also allowed for the professionalization of medicine as it has in many other areas of healthcare as well.

As a medical interpreter trainer, educator, and mentor, one of the most interesting and fascinating aspects of my job is watching students make the transition from student medical interpreter to *trained* medical interpreter. This occurs not only because they obtain their certificate in medical interpreting, but rather, because they have been enlightened. They leave the course knowing far more than they did just a few short weeks before and are often humbled by their training experience. They learn that no matter how much they study there will always be a medical term that they do not know. They now know that challenges will always arise in the triadic encounter regardless of how many encounters they have interpreted.

Through medical interpreter education we will continue to see the professionalization of medical interpreting. Comparatively speaking, the medical interpreting profession is in its infancy, but the standardization of training and the certification process are just the first of many steps to the professionalization of the field.

ESSAY #6

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Dr. Lizbeth N. Mendoza

Professionalization is important for Medical Interpreters to achieve recognition, credibility and respect from the community they serve, other healthcare professionals, and in general from society, which will derive in better work conditions, growth opportunities, and economic return. But without any doubt the most important reason is the safety of the patients. Epstein and Hundert (2002) provided a practical yet comprehensive definition relevant to our discussion:

Professional competence is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served.

Becoming a Professional in Healthcare is a commitment that arises from genuine interest in helping others, with altruism, dedication, respect, and empathy. Medical Interpreters may get lost in the overwhelming amount of different types of knowledge and skills they require in order to successfully approach the multitude of challenges that they face: intellectual, emotional, ethical, cultural, administrative, economic, and legal, among other struggles. This concern about how much there is to learn in order to be competent is valid and much needed because, as participants in the healthcare sector, we all know that carelessness, ignorance, and misunderstandings may compromise not only our job, but most importantly the patient's satisfaction, well-being, health, or even, life.

In order to successfully assimilate all this body of knowledge, Medical Interpreters need spaces and times dedicated specifically to reflecting on their role; instances of how to place their concepts in context; safe opportunities to put their skills to the test; forums exclusively dedicated to facilitating the acknowledgement, elaboration, analysis, exchange, and organization of facts, ideas, goals and values. This is exactly what Education provides.

It is through education that professionals acquire a solid framework upon which to build higher levels of understanding of their endeavor, therefore becoming competent and proficient in what they do. Through the systematic examination of the myriad skills and knowledge required to provide professional services, interpreters will develop successful strategies and make well founded decisions before, during and after each encounter. By exchanging experiences in the field and reflecting on the ramifications of a given behavior, they will progress in modeling responsible conduct. By being more and better educated about their affairs, Medical Interpreters grow in the confidence that they are qualified members of the healthcare team, dignifying their career and empowering themselves.

Finally, the availability of a body of knowledge, ethical codes, standards of practice, certification procedures, research, and strong professional associations like IMIA, calls out for a community of Medical Interpreters with a strong background in their line of work, who not only are providing excellent services and are in tune with the status quo of the profession, but can also contribute to the growth, advancement, and strengthening of this field, generating new approaches and recommendations, educating the community and the new generations of practitioners about this invaluable healthcare profession.

Reference:

Epstein RM, Hundert EM. Defining and assessing professional competence. *JAMA* 2002; 287(2):226–235.

ESSAY #7

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Mutaz Al Mudaris:

While Collecting my thoughts on this topic I was thinking of a similar title like: "1000 reasons why medical interpreter education is key to professionalism". Simply because the benefits are countless. I can write volumes about this, yet because its such a rich topic I had difficulty in where to start from....

Education is offered nowadays in different forms. e.g. Training courses , seminars , webinars, conferences, workshops, academic studies , online resources, publications... etc. All offered by private and public institutions. We are so incredibly lucky to be living in this era where knowledge can easily be brought into our fold.

One example of education is training. The "training room" is a unique place where you can make "mistakes" and learn how to correct them in a supportive atmosphere without hurting your own credibility or that of the institution (s) you represent. One would imagine a topic like medical terminology for instance is a dry one. But you'll be surprised how modern day approaches are packed with interactive, fun and useful exercises. I arrived to the US in 2009. I hold a B.Sc in Agricultural engineering from my home country with a major in plant pathology. I was told with my skills I'd easily find a job. 3 months later, I was working 3 part time jobs 7 days a week. A phone interviewer, a green grocer in produce dept and a Spa receptionist. Alongside, I was a volunteer interpreter at Thomas Jefferson university hospital for the family medicine refugee program. I was instantly captured by how appreciative both the providers and patients were.

My first exposure to training in this field was the BTG course in 2011. Before the course was over, I was offered a job with the delivering company and things sky rocketed from there. Prior to taking the course I felt with the experience I posses, I had it all. But afterwards I realized what I was really missing. The course opened my eyes to a load of dreams, thoughts and motivations where the sky is the limit ... Yet again, for a while, I felt invincible like Indiana Jones...

So why seek education?

Education paves the way towards refining your skills. There's always a new thing to learn, room for improvement, new challenges and opportunities because this profession is so heavenly dynamic. Additionally, other treats come along with the package like networking, meeting new people, sharing experiences, enriching your professional and private life and celebrating success, having the opportunity to Mentor or be mentored. Either way it gives job satisfaction. Simply having pure fun. Education gives you a sense of your capabilities and makes you discover your own talents and perfect them. You would be surprised of what you are capable of doing. Furthering your education also helps gauge the level you have reached. Today, I'm a licensed trainer/medical interpreter in the number 1 children's hospital nationwide and maybe in the world. I have 13+ years in translation, interpretation and English language tutoring. But guess what? I'm still a student of the game!

My advice for those who have passion for this noble profession is, want to make a difference in your life and lives of others? Do it right from the beginning. There's really no excuse not to. Now back to the title, How many reasons did we count? 5? Just add another 995 and you'll have "1000 reasons why medical interpreter education is key to professionalism"

ESSAY #8

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Rafael M Mas-Nieves CMI-Spanish

As a bilingual individual (English/Spanish), helping LEP's communicate with others, have be a very satisfactory and fulfilling passion. Whether it was done for a stranger at a retail store, a family member calling the utility company, or a friend trying to buy a ticket for a concert, trying to help by interpreting was always a treat, but occasionally with bad results. Of course, getting the wrong color of paint, or the wrong phone number was not a big deal in those cases. But now with the proper Medical Interpreter Education, it have become obvious that it takes much more than knowing a second language to be a Professional Medical Interpreter. Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization for many reasons. Even when being recently certified as a Medical Interpreter, interpreting has been part of my life for more than 20 years without knowing it. Luckily I did not have to interpret in a medical setting back then. Without the proper education, the results could have been terrible.

When dealing with patients' health, it is important to follow rules and standards that can only be learned through proper medical education. Untrained interpreters, although with great intentions, have a tendency to modify the message by adding, omitting, or changing it; to make the target person feel better about the conversation. Sometimes to influence the result of the conversation, or to stay away from hurting someone's feelings or believes. For example, in a non-medical situation with the car mechanic, a person can be told: "if you don't change the oil more often the engine will blow up", and the interpreter would render "the mechanic thinks that your car will run smoother if you can change the oil more often". Both messages suggest a better-scheduled maintenance, but the interpreter did not emphasize in the urgency of the condition of the car. In the medical setting this can have a devastating result.

Medical interpreter education makes us understand that we have to be loyal to the intended message. Being the conduit of the concept expressed, and not just interpret word by word. We must interpret thoughts, ask for clarifications and not fill the gaps for words that we did not catch, even if they seem obvious. There should be no assumptions in medical interpreting. In the medical field, changing an intended message could result in serious consequences, as opposed to a social non-medical session. Is all about accuracy and matching cultural meanings and thoughts.

Without the proper Medical Interpreter Education, it would have been impossible to learn and understand the standards of interpreting, as well as the codes of ethics that are so important and make the difference between a trained interpreter and one without the training. Thanks to this education and available resources, ethical and practice standards that make us professional are better understood. It is great to know that providers are also being educated about how to work with an interpreter.

For LEP patients, interpreters are just as important as doctors, nurses, therapists, or any other health care professional. An interpreter has a significant impact in the overall result before, during, and after a patient's treatment. For this and many more reasons, Medical Interpreter Education is Key to professionalization.

ESSAY #9

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Theresa M Heath, MS RID: CI, CT, ED: K-12, NIC-Master and SC: L

Interpreting is a young profession and for sign language interpreters lacked standardization until 1964. Over those five decades, interpreting has evolved and is now touted as a practice profession much like that of doctor, lawyer, or an accountant. New theories have been developed, ethics has become a focus within the profession, and new and improved best practices are published daily.

Medical education is the key to professionalization for interpreters. In spite of the shift of interpreters becoming professionals, who sometimes hold advanced degrees, and become nationally certified, something is still lacking. Although interpreters have acquired multiple certifications, often one shows up to an assignment and continues to face attitudes and belief systems that one may have encountered twenty or even thirty years ago.

To completely evolve into a practice profession, one must educate them fully in the venue where they are interpreting and nowhere is this more evident than the medical setting. One must become educated about body systems and human anatomy and know them well enough to be aware when they do not understand the source language and to ask intelligent clarifying questions to provide a comprehensive interpretation for the consumers involved in the assignment. One needs to become well versed on a variety of procedures and understand technical, medical vocabulary to ensure that consumers have equal access to information and to take college classes as well to show consumers that we are highly educated and qualified professionals. Cultural knowledge within the target group is important as well as one must be aware of the culture for both expressive and receptive discourse to be presented accurately.

Mental health terminology is important to know and one should have an understanding of mental health disorders and accompanying symptoms that could possibly stymie a working interpreter on an assignment. Along with the mental health disorders, one must be aware of how to work with those individuals, the team approach that is most appropriate in the setting and a working knowledge of common medicines used in mental health interpreting settings. Mental Health Interpreter Training given by the Department of Mental Health in Alabama is highly recommended as it includes pharmacology, mental health disorders, demand-control schema, and how to recognize the difference and interpret appropriately for someone with cognitive disorders as well as mental health disorders.

It behooves interpreters to also have a working knowledge of common medicines for medical disorders and a medical terminology workshop is beneficial for interpreting work in the medical settings. For the first time outside of the courtroom, the field is becoming collaborative between both foreign language and sign language interpreters and it can only serve to present us all in a more professional light. Regulations are dictating national certifications for the medical and mental health settings and with that national certification, one should present themselves in a manner that other professionals treat with respect and further understand that without the highly specialized medical professional to interpret for all parties that their work is negated and misunderstood by the linguistic minority speaker.

ESSAY #10

Why Medical Interpreter Education is Key to Professionalization

By Vanessa Caraveo, CMI-Spanish:

The Flame that Never Dies: Education

The great American philosopher John Dewey once said,

“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

This truly depicts the importance education has in our lives and more so, the benefits one reaps in attaining the knowledge needed in today’s fast-paced world and ever changing society and of course, also applying the education one attains into one’s chosen career field.

I still vividly recall the day I chose to embark in my quest towards my chosen profession as a Medical Interpreter and from the start I was very much aware of the time, dedication and most importantly proper education this career choice would demand in order for me to be the best professional Medical Interpreter I could be and in order to be able to give the highest quality of service possible to those I served.

Enrolling in Medical Interpreting courses to gain the knowledge I needed assisted me tremendously and gave me important insight on things one needs to know that include interpreter protocols, confidentiality laws, code of ethics, and medical terminology that I definitely have utilized in this field numerous times throughout the years.

When the time came to become Nationally Certified, it was then I was enlightened on the realization that all the information I had learned during my Medical Interpreter education had served me well in knowing what was expected of me in order to attain my credential, and needless to say I received my credential as a Certified Medical Interpreter on my first try which has been by far one of my life’s greatest personal achievements.

To this day, I continue having the discipline needed to stay on top of my profession by taking and attending continuing education courses which keep me up-to-date in today’s evolving medical environment and informing me of what is available to me to help sharpen my skills and keep me at my best as a professional, ensuring I give the best quality service to those I render my skills to.

Simply being bilingual with no prior education in medical interpreting isn’t enough; especially in the complex medical environment. I, personally, am constantly learning new things every day as this field exposes one to a variety of health scenarios and by having professionals who are educated and proficient in their field, many health mishaps are prevented protecting health-care entities from liability issues and more importantly ensuring proper diagnoses and treatments for the patient’s well-being, proving well-educated and fully competent medical interpreters do have a positive impact in the medical field.

As Socrates once said, “Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel,” and as long as I am a Certified Medical Interpreter I will ensure my flame never dies and I continue my education, expanding my knowledge to ensure I continue giving the highest quality service I can to others in this wonderful profession that has brought me much satisfaction and joy in serving others throughout the years.