



The International Medical Interpreters Association

Celebrates Charity Status at 25th Year Anniversary:

A Historic Perspective

Boston, October 19, 2011

The IMIA was started in 1986 as the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association, or MMIA. It was founded by Raquel Cashman, medical interpreter at Boston City Hospital, who formed an informal support group of interpreter coordinators at several hospitals in Boston. These included Massachusetts General Hospital, Brockton Hospital, New England Medical Center, Brigham and Women's Hospital, and Deaconess Medical Center. Many of these organizations have changed names, and it was not until 1991 that the organization actually incorporated.

The organization had the following presidents from 1986 until 2006: Raquel Cashman, Maria Durham, John Nickrosz, and Joy Connell. These were the first four presidents of the organization's first twenty years. Many people do not know this but the organization counted on members from Canada shortly after incorporation and were in fact a national organization from inception. The organization published the first Code of Ethics in 1987 and then the first Standards of Practice in 1995. These were necessary steps to the development of certification, in the organization's charter from the articles of incorporation. The organization planned the first national conference on medical interpreting in 1996. From that time on, the MMIA organization remained focused in organizing annual conferences for medical interpreters and publishing guides and continued to work on developing a certification program for medical interpreters.

I joined the MMIA in 1994 when John Nickrosz was the president. I did not have the pleasure of knowing the former presidents. John Nickrosz gave his all to the association as all the presidents have done each in their own unique way. Joy Connell succeeded John Nickrosz, Izabel Arocha succeeded Joy Connell and Lola Bendana, our first Canadian president now holds the office. The conference started out in small humble venues and has since grown into a force of its own most recently held at the Harvard Medical School Conference Center in Boston” stated Cynthia Schenck, IMIA Board member and President of Medical Interpreters of the North Shore.

When Izabel Arocha was elected president in the summer of 2006, the organization was comprised of 600 members from all over the country and some from abroad. *I'm very proud that we collectively could accomplish so much in so short period of time. Personally I continued to file both the Federal and State taxes after my predecessor Jordan Coriza, the Treasurer, and worked with the whole team on the non-profit status,”* said, Yilu Ma, MA, MS, past Treasurer of IMIA and current Director of Brigham and Women's Hospital , Interpreter Services Department

The IMIA continued to grow in membership and in April of 2007 in Sydney Australia the then MMIA went international and renamed itself as the International Medical Interpreters Association, the IMIA, to better reflect its mission and composition. It was well received by the majority of members who understood that the organization needed a more international structure to benefit the international members.

The next major milestone of the organization was the development and launch of national certification exams, along with Language Line University, through the founding of the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters, an independent non-profit created solely to oversee national certification in the US. This was a huge accomplishment for the field. *“National Certification is a dream come true for many interpreters, and that was the mandate we had as an organization from them, to develop an equitable and high quality program that will soon become available in all languages,”* stated Juana Horton, National Board member and President of Horton Interpreting Services.

The next Bylaws revision took place between July and August 2011. The IMIA Board, after careful deliberation and ratification of the IMIA Bylaws Subcommittee and attorney recommendations, decided to put forth another vote of further Bylaws revisions and revisit the official name change. Since 2007 much has changed. The IMIA now has nine official international IMIA Chapters and the list of international members is growing rapidly. Our president Lola Bendana resides in Canada, and several of our IMIA Board members and Advisory Board members are also non-US practitioners. In essence, the IMIA is no longer international due only to membership composition but due to its governance structure and mission. While still a US-based organization, the IMIA is really an international organization. *“The now IMIA has grown incredibly over the years and is quickly becoming internationally known as a force of justice and equality in the industry of medical interpreting. I fully expect this trend to continue due to the selfless dedication of the IMIA Board members, the national and international chapters, and the involved and motivated growing membership,”* stated Lola Bendana, President of the IMIA.

Much of the work done in the past 25 years has been done solely by volunteers as an act of charity to the profession. The most recent Bylaws revision was also necessary due to our long pending application with the IRS to become a 501(c) (3) organization. This new status just given to the IMIA by the IRS allows the IMIA to not only fulfill its mission as a charity organization but to also request funding and grants for many of its most urgent projects. *“This is definitely going to take the organization to another level, in terms of scope of work and funding resources, and it is great that it came on our 25th Anniversary year,”* stated Izabel S. Arocha, M.Ed, CMI, Executive Director of the IMIA. *“As a membership driven organization we’ve been able to do so much. I can’t even imagine what we will be able to accomplish now with this new status in the next 25 years.”*

The 501(c)(3) charitable status is a federal status that means the organization does not have to pay tax on its surplus income *“The organization can now apply this surplus towards initiatives that allow the IMIA to continue moving forward. This also means that many doors have been opened to the Fundraising Committee to pursue larger donations, which are now tax deductible to its donors, and may not have been so attractive in the past due to the lack of this charitable status,”* stated Ester Bishop, Chairperson of the Fundraising Committee.

The 501(c)(3) charitable status also means that individuals and corporations may claim a charitable contribution deduction for contributions made to it. 501(c)(3) charities have that status for federal purposes no matter where they operate within the United States.

“If you want to check the federal status, it is possible to check on line at the IRS website, which provides the official list. The most direct way, of course, is to ask the organization,” stated Stephanie Honan, the IMIA’s Bookkeeper and financial consultant.

About the IMIA

The IMIA is an umbrella association that promotes all standards and best practices in the field of medical interpreting. As an international trade association of medical interpreters, it represents over 2,000 practicing medical interpreters as the ultimate experts in medical interpreting. It is also the only national trade association of medical interpreters in the US, and is an official active member of FIT, the Federation of Interpreters and Translators, an international organization comprised of trade associations of interpreters and translators worldwide. It is a partner member of AILIA, the Languages Industry Association, headquartered in Canada. IMIA developed the first code of ethics, standards, annual conference, and certification for medical interpreters and continues to be a pioneer in the field with its recent work to develop the first Interpreter Educators Code of Ethics and National Education Registry. Most current work involves developing an accreditation for medical interpreter training program. (www.imiaweb.org)